

T H E
ENGLISH PREACHER.

V O L. VII. -



T H E
ENGLISH PREACHER:

O R,
S E R M O N S

ON THE PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS OF
RELIGION AND MORALITY,

SELECTED, REVISED, AND ABRIDGED FROM
VARIOUS AUTHORS.

VOLUME THE SEVENTH.

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*And that servant which knew his lord's
will, and prepared not himself, neither
did according to his will, shall be beaten
with many stripes: But he that knew not,
and did commit things worthy of stripes,*

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shall

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E R R A T U M.

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S E R M O N I.

PRACTICE IN RELIGION NECESSARY,
IN PROPORTION TO OUR KNOWLEDGE.

LUKE XII. 47, 48.

And that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes : But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required ; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

THESE words of our Lord are the application of two parables, which he had delivered before, to excite men to a diligent and careful
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practice of their duty, that so they may be in a continual readiness and preparation for the coming of their Lord. The first parable is more general, and concerns all men, who are represented as so many servants in a great family, from which the lord is absent, who being uncertain of the time of his return, should always be in a condition and posture to receive him. Upon the hearing of this parable, Peter enquires of our Saviour, whether he intended this only for his disciples, or for all? To which question our Saviour returns an answer in another parable which more particularly concerned them; who, because they were to be the chief rulers and governors of his church, are represented by the stewards of a great family. “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?” If he discharge his duty, “blessed is he;” but if he shall take occasion in his lord’s absence, to domineer over his fellow-servants, and riotously to waste his lord’s goods, his lord, when he comes, will punish him
after

after a more severe and exemplary manner.

And then follows the application of the whole, in the words of the text; “And that servant which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.” As if he had said, And well may such a servant deserve so severe a punishment, who having such a trust committed to him, and knowing his lord’s will so much better, yet does contrary to it. Upon which, our Saviour takes occasion to compare the fault and punishment of those who have greater advantages and opportunities of knowing their duty, with those who are ignorant of it; “That servant which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to it, shall be beaten with many stripes: But he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.” And then he adds the reason and the equity of this proceeding; “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom

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“men have committed much, of him
“they will ask the more.”

From these words we may observe, first, That ignorance is a great excuse of men's faults, and will lessen their punishment; “He that knew not, but did
“commit things worthy of stripes, shall
“be beaten with few stripes.”

For the clearing of this, it will be requisite to consider what ignorance it is which our Saviour here speaks of; and this is necessary to be enquired into, because it is certain that there is some sort of ignorance which doth wholly excuse and clear from all manner of guilt; and there is another sort, which doth either not at all, or very little extenuate the faults of men; so that it must be a third sort, different from both these, which our Saviour here means.

There is an ignorance which doth wholly excuse and clear from all manner of guilt, and that is an absolute and invincible ignorance; when a person is wholly ignorant of the thing, which, if he knew, he should be bound to do, but neither can nor could have helped it, that he is ignorant of it; that is, that he either had not the capacity, or wanted
the

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the means and opportunity of knowing it. In this case a person is in no fault, if he did not do what he never knew, nor could know to be his duty. For God measures the faults of men by their wills, and if there be no defect there, there can be no guilt; for no man is guilty, but he that is conscious to himself that he would not do what he knew he ought to do, or would do what he knew he ought not to do. Now if a man be simply and invincibly ignorant of his duty, his neglect of it is altogether involuntary; for the will hath nothing to do, where the understanding doth not first direct. This is the case with young children, idiots, and distracted persons. And to those who have the free and perfect use of their reason, no neglect of any duty is imputed, of which they are absolutely and invincibly ignorant. For instance, it is a duty incumbent upon all mankind, to believe in the Son of God, where he is sufficiently manifested and revealed to them; but those who never heard of him, nor had any opportunity of coming to the knowledge of him, shall not be condemned for this infidelity, because it is impossible they should “believe on him, of

whom they never heard :” they may indeed be condemned upon other accounts, for sinning against the light of nature, and for not obeying “the law which was written in their hearts;” for what the Apostle says of the revelation of the law, is as true of any other revelation of God; “As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned under the law, shall be judged by the law.” In like manner, those who have sinned without the Gospel, that is, who never had the knowledge of it, shall not be condemned for any offence against that revelation which was never made to them, but for their violation of the law of nature; only they that have sinned under the Gospel, shall be judged by it.

There is likewise another sort of ignorance, which either doth not at all, or very little extenuate the faults of men, when men are not only ignorant, but chuse to be so; that is, when they wilfully neglect those means and opportunities of knowledge which are afforded to them; such as Job speaks of, “Who say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.”
And

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And this sort of ignorance many among the Jews were guilty of, when our Saviour came and preached to them, but they would not be instructed by him; "The light came among them, but they loved darkness rather than light," as he himself says of them; and as he says elsewhere of the Pharisees, "They rejected the council of God against themselves," they wilfully shut their eyes against that light which offered itself to them; "They would not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts, that they might be converted, and healed." Now an ignorance in this degree wilful, can hardly be imagined to carry any excuse at all in it. He that knew not his lord's will, because he would not know it, because he wilfully rejected the means of coming to the knowledge of it, deserves to be beaten with as many stripes, as if he had known it; because he might have known it, and would not.

So that it is neither of these sorts of ignorance that our Saviour means, neither absolute and invincible ignorance, nor that which is grossly wilful and affected: for the first, men deserve not to

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be beaten at all, because they cannot help it; for the latter, they deserve not to be excused, because they might have helped their ignorance, and would not.

But our Saviour here speaks of such an ignorance as does in a good degree extenuate the fault, and yet not wholly excuse it; for he says of them, that "they knew not their lord's will," and yet that this ignorance did not wholly excuse them from blame, nor exempt them from punishment, but "they should be beaten with few stripes."

There is, then, an ignorance which is in some degree faulty, and yet does in a great measure excuse the faults which proceed from it; and this is when men are not absolutely ignorant of their duty, but only in comparison of others, who have a far more clear and distinct knowledge of it; and though they do not grossly and wilfully neglect the means of further knowledge, yet perhaps they do not make the best use they might of the opportunities they have of knowing their duty better; and therefore in comparison of others, who have far better means and advantages of knowing their lord's will, they may be said not to know it, though
they

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they are not simply ignorant of it, but only have a more obscure and uncertain knowledge of it. Now this ignorance doth in a great measure excuse such persons, and extenuate their crimes, in comparison of those who had a clearer and more perfect knowledge of their master's will; and yet it does not free them from all guilt, because they did not live up to that degree of knowledge which they had; and perhaps if they had used more care and industry, they might have known their lord's will better. God does not expect so much from these, as from others, to whom he hath given greater capacity, and advantages of knowledge; and when our Lord shall come to call his servants to an account, they shall be beaten with fewer stripes than others; they shall not wholly escape, because they were not wholly ignorant; but by how much they had less knowledge than others, by so much their punishment shall be lighter.

And there is all the equity in the world it should be so, that men should be accountable according to what they have received, and that to whom less is given, less should be required at their hands.

The Scripture hath told us, that "God will judge the world in righteousness;" and justice doth require, that in taxing the punishment of offenders, every thing should be considered, that may be a just excuse and extenuation of their crimes, and that accordingly their punishment should be abated. Now the greatest extenuation of any fault is ignorance, which when it proceeds from no fault of ours, no fault can proceed from it; so that so far as any man is innocently ignorant of his duty, so far he is excusable for the neglect of it; for every degree of ignorance takes off so much from the perverseness of the will.

I do not intend this discourse for any commendation of ignorance, or encouragement to it. For knowledge hath many advantages above it, and is much more desirable, if we use it well; and if we do not, it is our own fault: if we be not wanting to ourselves, we may be much happier by our knowledge, than any man can be by his ignorance; for though ignorance may plead an excuse, yet it can hope for no reward; and it is always better to need no excuse, than to have the best in the world ready at hand

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to plead for ourselves. Besides, we may do well to consider, that ignorance is no where an excuse where it is cherished. It would be the vainest thing in the world for any man to foster it, in hopes thereby to excuse himself; for where it is wilful and chosen, it is a fault; and it is the most unreasonable thing in the world, that any man's fault should prove his excuse. So that this can be no encouragement to ignorance, to say that it extenuates the faults of men: for it does not extenuate them, whenever it is wilful and affected; and whenever it is designed and chosen, it is wilful. No man therefore can reasonably design to continue ignorant, that he may have an excuse for his faults, because then the ignorance is wilful, and whenever it is so, it ceaseth to be an excuse.

I proceed to observe, secondly, that the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing the will of God, and his duty, the greater will be his condemnation if he do not do it. "The servant
" which knew his lord's will, and pre-
" pared not himself, neither did accord-
" ing to it, shall be beaten with many
" stripes."

The preparation of our mind to do the will of God, whenever there is occasion and opportunity for it, is accepted with him; a will rightly disposed to obey God, though it be not brought into act, for want of opportunity, does not lose its reward: but when, notwithstanding we know our Lord's will, there are neither the act, nor the preparation and resolution of doing it, what punishment may we not expect?

The just God, in punishing the sins of men, proportions the punishment to the crime; and where the crime is greater, the punishment riseth: as amongst the Jews, where the crime was small, the malefactor was sentenced to "a few stripes; where it was great, he was "beaten with many." Thus our Saviour represents the great Judge of the world dealing with sinners; according as their sins are aggravated, he will add to their punishment. Now after all the aggravations of sin, there is none that doth more intrinsically heighten the malignity of it, than when it is committed against the clear knowledge of our duty; and that, first,

Because

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Because the knowledge of God's will is so great an advantage to the doing of it; and every advantage for doing our duty, is a certain aggravation of our neglect of it. And this is the reason which our Saviour adds in the text; "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him much will be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." It was, no doubt, a great discouragement and disadvantage to the Heathens, that they were so doubtful concerning the will of God, and in many cases left to the uncertainty of their own reason, by what means they might best apply themselves to the pleasing of him; and this discouraged several of the wisest of them from all serious endeavours in religion, thinking it as good to do nothing, as to be mistaken about it. Others that were more naturally devout, and could not satisfy their consciences without some expressions of religion, fell into various superstitions, and were ready to embrace any form of worship which custom prescribed, or the fancies of men could suggest to them; and hence sprang all the stupid and barbarous idolatries of
the

the Heathens. For ignorance growing upon the world, that natural propension which was in the minds of men to religion, and the worship of a deity, for want of certain direction, expressed itself in those foolish and abominable idolatries, which were practised among the Heathens.

And is it not, then, a great advantage to us, that we have the clear and certain direction of Divine Revelation? We have the will of God plainly discovered to us, and all the parts of our duty clearly defined and determined; so that no man that is in any measure free from interest and prejudice, can easily mistake in any great and material part of his duty. We have the nature of God plainly revealed to us, and such a character of him given, as is most suitable to our natural conceptions of a Deity; as render him both awful and amiable; for the Scripture represents him to us as great and good, powerful and merciful, a perfect hater of sin, and a great lover of mankind: and we have the law and manner of his worship, so far as was needful, and the rules of a good life, clearly expressed and laid down; and as a powerful motive and argument to the obedience

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obedience of those laws, a plain discovery made to us of the rewards and punishments of another world. And is not this a great advantage to the doing of God's will, to have it so plainly declared to us, and so powerfully enforced upon us; so that our duty lies plainly before us; we see what we have to do, and the danger of neglecting it? Considering then the advantage we have for doing God's will, by our clear knowledge of it, we are altogether inexcusable if we do it not.

The knowledge of our Lord's will is likewise a great obligation upon us to the doing of it. For what ought in reason to oblige us more to do any thing, than to be fully assured that it is the will of God, and that it is the law of the great Sovereign of the world, who is able to save, or to destroy? That it is the pleasure of him that made us, and who hath declared that he designs to make us happy, by our obedience to his laws? So that if we know these things to be the will of God, we have the greatest obligation to do them, whether we consider the authority of God, or our own interest; and if we neglect them, we have nothing to say in our own excuse. We knew the law,

law, and the advantage of keeping it, and the penalty of breaking it; and if after this we will transgress, there is no apology to be made for us. They have something to plead for themselves, who can say, that though they had some apprehension of some parts of their duty, and their minds were apt to dictate to them that they ought to do some things, yet the different apprehensions of mankind about several of these things, and the doubts and uncertainties of their own minds concerning them, made them easy to be carried off from their duty, by the power of temptations: but had they had a clear and undoubted revelation from God, and had certainly known these things to be his will, this would have conquered and born down all objections and temptations to the contrary; or if it had not, would have stopped their mouths, and taken away all excuse from them. There is some colour in this plea, that in many cases they did not know certainly what the will of God was; but for us, who own a clear revelation from God, and profess to believe it, what can we say for ourselves, why he should not pour forth all his wrath, and

and execute upon us the fierceness of his anger?

The neglect of God's will when we know it, cannot be without a great deal of wilfulness and contempt. If we know it, and do it not, the fault is solely in our wills, and the more wilful any sin is, the more heinously wicked is it. There can hardly be a greater aggravation of a crime, than that it proceeds from mere obstinacy and perverseness; and if we know it to be our Lord's will, and do it not, we are guilty of the highest contempt of the greatest authority in the world. And do we think this to be but a small aggravation, to affront the great Sovereign and Judge of the world? not only to break his laws, but to trample upon them and despise them, when we know whose laws they are? "Will we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" We believe that it is God who said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour; thou shalt not hate, or oppress, or defraud thy brother in any thing; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" and shall we notwithstanding venture to break these laws, knowing

knowing whose authority they are stamp withal? After this contempt of him, what favour can we hope for from him? What can we say for ourselves, why any one of those many stripes which are threatened should be abated to us? Something may be pardoned to ignorance; but contempt can expect no forgiveness. He that strikes his prince, not knowing him to be so, hath something to say for himself, that though he did a disloyal act, yet it did not proceed from a disloyal mind: but he that first acknowledgeth him for his prince, and then affronts him, deserves to be prosecuted with the utmost severity, because he did it wilfully, and in mere contempt. The knowledge of our duty, and that it is the will of God which we oppose, takes away all possible excuse from us; for nothing can be said, why we should offend him who hath both authority to command us, and power to destroy us.

Thus I have, as briefly as I could, represented to you the true ground and reason of the aggravation of those sins, which are committed against the clear knowledge of God's will, and our duty; because this knowledge is so great an advantage

vantage to the doing of our duty; so great an obligation upon us to it; and because the neglect of our Lord's will in this case, cannot be without great wilfulness, and a downright contempt of his authority.

And shall I now need to tell you, how much it concerns every one of us, to live up to that knowledge which we have of our Lord's will, and to prepare ourselves to do according to it; to be always in a readiness and disposition to do what we know to be his will, and actually to do it, when there is occasion and opportunity?

God has not left us, as he did the Heathens for many ages, to the imperfect and uncertain direction of natural light; nor hath he revealed his will to us, as he did to the Jews, in dark types and shadows; but hath made a clear discovery of his mind and will to us. The dispensation which we are under, hath no vail upon it; "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth; we are of the day, and of the light;" and therefore it may justly be expected that we should "put off the works of darkness, and walk as children of the light." Every degree of knowledge which we have, is an aggravation of the sins committed
against

against it, and when our Lord comes to pass sentence upon us, will add to the number of our stripes. Nay, if God should inflict no positive torment upon sinners, yet their own minds would deal most severely with them upon this account; and nothing will wound their consciences more, than to remember against what light they have offended. For herein lies the very nature and sting of all guilt, to be conscious to ourselves, "that we
"knew what we ought to have done,
"and did it not." The vices and corruptions which reigned in the world before, will be pardonable, in comparison of ours. "The times of that ignorance
"God winked at: but now he commands all men every where to repent." Mankind had some excuse for their errors before, and God was pleased in a great measure to overlook them; but "if we continue still in our sins, we have no cloak for them." All the degrees of light which we enjoy, are so many talents committed to us by our Lord, for the improving whereof, he will call us to a strict account; "For unto whomsoever
"much is given, of him much shall be
"required; and to whom he hath committed
"mitted

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“mitted much, of him he will ask the
“more.” And nothing is more reasonable, than that men should account for all the advantages and opportunities they have had of knowing the will of God; and that as their knowledge was increased, so their sorrow and punishment should proportionably rise, if they sin against it. The ignorance of a great part of the world is deservedly pitied and lamented by us; but the condemnation of none is so dreadful, as of those who having the knowledge of God’s will, neglected to do it; “How much better had it been for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them!” If we had been born, and brought up in ignorance of the true God and his will, “we had had no sin,” in comparison of what now we have: “but now that we see, our sin remains.” This will aggravate our condemnation beyond measure, that we had the knowledge of salvation so clearly revealed to us. Our duty lies plainly before us, we know what we ought to do, and “what manner of persons we ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness.”

We

We believe the coming of our Lord to judgment, and we know not how soon he may be "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels," not only "to take vengeance on them that know not God," but on them that have known him, and yet "obey not the Gospel of his Son." And if all this will not move us to prepare ourselves to do our Lord's will, we deserve to have our stripes multiplied. No condemnation can be too heavy for those who offend against the clear knowledge of God's will, and their duty.

Let us then be persuaded to set about the practice of what we know; let the light which is in our understandings, descend upon our hearts and lives; let us not dare to continue any longer in the practice of any known sin, nor in the neglect of any thing which we are convinced is our duty; for, "Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God: but if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things."

S E R M O N II.

ON THE TRUE GUARD OF INNOCENCE;
AND THE NATURAL PROGRESS OF VICE.

MATTHEW XXVI. 35.

*Peter said unto him, though I should die
with thee, yet will I not deny thee.*

THIS, which is recorded in the text,
was certainly, in itself, a brave
and noble resolution; and if it had been
as firmly adhered to, as it was honestly
formed, the Apostle's character, in this
particular scene of his life, would have
been

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been transmitted down, with distinguished honour, to all succeeding ages. But the event was, in reality, quite different; and affords a flagrant and melancholy proof of the frailty, and inconstancy, of human nature. It shews it, indeed, to be so fickle and mutable, as that, sometimes, there is but a very short interval between resolving well, and doing ill; and a quick surprising transition, from the most solemn professions of zeal, and uncommon ardour, in the cause of virtue, to a direct and public renunciation of it. Every example of this sort is a standing lesson of humility, and caution, to the rest of mankind: and the moral causes of it may, in most instances, be distinctly traced; and have the same influence in all times. So that we may consider the text, as extending far beyond the personal character of St. Peter, and taking a much wider scope: and discourse from it, as if the depravity and dishonour of human nature was the subject; and man, as man, the auditor, to whom it is properly addressed.

St. Peter appears, from his whole history, to have been a person of a lively and sanguine temper. We find him,
upon

upon many occasions, professing, with a peculiar earnestness and warmth, his affection and inviolable fidelity to his Master; and resenting every thing, which, he apprehended, was injurious to him, or disparaging to his dignity. He could, therefore, hardly bear to be told, even by Christ himself, that the strength of his zeal would ever abate, and much less that he would openly deny his Lord; but, from the forwardness, and some degree of presumption, that was natural to him, joined with the experience of an honest uncorrupted heart, he declared his resolution, as in the text, (in which, he made no doubt, but he might confide) “to die with him,” rather than, through base fear and cowardice, to betray and desert his cause.

And the very same circumstances, that account for the vehemence and heat of his resolution, will likewise account, in a great measure, for his inglorious fall. For, presuming too far, and having no distrust of his own firmness and stability, it is highly probable, that he stood less upon his guard, and neglected to weigh, with that seriousness and deliberation, which the importance of it deserved, the

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seasonable and friendly admonition, which his Master had given him. And, thus, the temptation assaulted him, over-powered him, and robbed him of his best treasure, his innocence, before he was duly sensible, though forewarned of his danger. An error this, that all who are of the same warm and sanguine dispositions, are more peculiarly exposed to, not only in cases of extraordinary trial, but in the common course of virtue, and of human life: such being, generally, more hasty and eager to resolve, than they are steady to execute; and being apt, withal, to entertain too high an opinion of themselves, and fail in the exercise of that constant vigilance and circumspection, which are absolutely necessary to maintain a life of religion, and strict morality.

But, to the account of St. Peter's heinous dissimulation, and apostacy from the truth, it is necessary, to do justice to his character, that we add what followed in consequence of it, his humiliation and repentance; which were attended with all possible marks of sincerity, and ingenuity of mind. For though he fell, and that fully and shamefully too, partly through his presumption, and partly through the sudden

sudden consternation, by which he was oppressed, and dispirited, and deprived of the aids and succours of reason; yet the integrity of his heart, which was only controlled, in its usual operation, by the present violence of the temptation, but had never totally deserted him, revived upon the first serious reflection, and discovered its superior influence. He lamented his error, and corrected it: his reformation was complete and lasting: he asserted the truth against its numerous and powerful opposers, undaunted, and unmoved, under the bitterest reproaches and persecutions; and sacrificed, for the sake of the glorious cause, which he had deliberately espoused, ease, liberty, and life. His inward goodness, now better fortified, and prepared for trials, shewed itself to be invincible; and he fulfilled the resolution, which he had before violated, through an unexpected surprise and terror: the resolution of even dying for Christ, rather than he would consent to deny him.

There are several observations naturally arising from this history, that are of universal importance and use.

The first of which, is, that there are some critical seasons of danger, that may at once overset a very sincere and well established virtue. These are, generally, such as come upon us by surprise, and against which we have not armed ourselves with a sufficient stock of resolution. Thus St. Peter, though he had purposed in general never to deny Christ, yet, not having impressed it upon his mind with proper weight, and not expecting the temptation, by which he was encountered, his resolution was not prepared to exert itself; and, of consequence, he may justly be said to have been disarmed, and wholly unprovided for his own defence, when his integrity was brought to the test. The maid-servant, belonging to the high priest, charged him with being a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, when his thoughts were wholly intent upon another subject. He apprehended himself to be in no danger, when his danger was nearest; and, upon such an unlooked for shock, dread and terror seized his spirits, and rendered him incapable of recollection, and of discovering a becoming presence and strength of mind. So that, his courage having forsaken him, and
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thoughts being perplexed and confuſed, he firſt began to prevaricate, and, in an evaſive manner, to deny the accuſation; and, ſoon after, being charged again, he again denied, in more direct and explicit terms; and at laſt, his fears, and together with them, his embarraſſment and guilt increaſing, he proceeded ſo far, as to renounce all relation to Chriſt, and knowledge of him, with falſe oaths and profane execrations.

And critical ſeaſons, of a like nature with this, frequently happen in the courſe of human affairs; ſudden and unexpected events, that put our virtue to a very ſevere and dangerous proof, and call for the immediate exerciſe of a ſtrong unſhaken reſolution: and yet have a natural tendency to alarm the paſſions, and diſſipate reflection. Propoſals, perhaps, are made to us, before we are aware of the deſign, to advance ourſelves by diſſimulation and injuſtice; we are flattered with the proſpect of extraordinary advantages, to be obtained by methods, that are not ſtrictly honourable; advantages quite above our common views in life, and which we could not reaſonably hope for: or elſe fair opportunities, and powerful

incitements, to the gratification of some criminal passion, (to which we are by constitution most inclined) unexpectedly present themselves. And thus our virtue may be oppressed, and borne down, by the very same temptations, assailing us in an unguarded hour, which, if they had been foreseen, and maturely deliberated upon, our integrity might have enabled us to repel, with a generous scorn and indignation. In all which cases, it is not so properly the temptation itself, as our being attacked by surprise, that subdues and enslaves us.

Another remark, suggested by the history to which the text refers, is, that the best and surest way to maintain our innocence, is to keep the mind calm and unruffled, and attentive to all events. If we are possessed of a sedate temper, we shall be able to determine with propriety, in all cases that occur to us. If reason be clear and undisturbed, we may always see our danger, and avoid it: we shall be furnished with sufficient motives to inspire steadiness and equanimity, and animate our resolution: we are, then, at liberty to weigh maturely every proposal that is made to us, and may shun the fatal

fatal effects of a rash and precipitate conduct. As long as we hold this rational and noble command of ourselves, we have but little cause to fear being surprised, and violently hurried, into immoralities; and, consequently, have guarded the weak side of human nature. And as for premeditated and determined wickedness, that has, almost always, its foundation in indeliberate and heedless excesses; which inflame the passions, gradually blind the understanding, and stupify the natural conscience of good and evil. And while the mind is unruffled, and continues to reflect coolly, it is scarce possible for it to consider, but with detestation and horror, such an abandoned state of depravation and disorder.

In like manner, if we are duly attentive to all events, that befall us, we shall probably be prepared for all events. We shall form our temper and behaviour in that manner, which is best adapted to them. We shall examine into their probable consequences, and guard against those that are injurious. We shall take care not to be betrayed into any practices, that are inconsistent with integrity, by indeliberate excesses of passion, or an

32. *On the true Guard of Innocence; and the*

overconfident presumption. And our virtue will, by this means, be so fortified and wisely defended, as to sustain the most difficult and laborious conflicts, to which it may be exposed; so as neither to be spotted and defiled by criminal compliances, nor sink under the weight of oppression.

Whereas, if we are disturbed and disordered by any intemperate passion, so as to have our reflections tumultuous and confused, and to be hindered from attending, regularly and calmly, to our present situation, and the proper duties of it, we can neither have judgment to direct, nor resolution to act with firmness and vigour; but in all sudden emergencies, shall be apt to follow the first sentiment, that rises within us; and be carried away, by the impulse of that particular passion, which happens to have the ascendancy, of whatever kind it be: and consequently we must be in imminent danger of deeply wounding our integrity, and forfeiting, perhaps entirely and irrecoverably, our peace and honour.

This which has been distinctly stated, is, on both sides, the probable tendency of things, according to the fixed laws of the human
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constitution. Perturbation, confusion, and inattention of mind are the immediate sources of vice: and calm reflection, seasonably and wisely applied to every event, that happens in the course of moral life, on what conduct is particularly suited to it and will inspire inward resolution to pursue it; this I say, is the necessary, the only, and will, by the blessing of God, prove a sure and effectual support of rectitude of heart, and manners.

I beg leave to add to all this, that it will be of great use to us seriously to consider, how it would be proper for us to act, in all the various states and conditions of human life; to imagine frequently, a change in our circumstances, to represent ourselves, to our own thoughts, as attended by temptations, which may never actually befall us, and reduced to a situation, that seems at present remote, and at a great distance from us. For, by making the virtues of every station intimate and familiar to our reflections, as well as the special instances of vigilance and resolution, that are required in it, we are never likely to be confounded, or lose our discretion and constancy, under the most sudden vicissitudes of this

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uncertain and variable scene of our existence. We are never likely to be surprised, at being called to act a new part, with which we are altogether unacquainted; but shall have both the rule of our behaviour, and motives to adhere to it, direct and plain before us.

Indeed, the heat and effort of resolution, which spring from present passion, and accidental momentary fits of zeal, are not, as is evident beyond dispute from St. Peter's case, a sufficient security and guard of our innocence. These may be honest, as his was, and spring from an inward sense of fitness, gratitude, and ingenuity, but are not likely to be permanent and durable. For the effects, of a sudden and high raised transport, seldom last longer than the transport itself; and that which may be depended upon, as a substantial defence of our virtue, must be something more deeply fixed, and rooted, in the heart. It must be a resolution framed upon comparing all circumstances, and weighing all consequences; a resolution often renewed, and urged, with due force, and efficacy, upon the conscience: in a word, a resolution rendered so habitual to us, when the danger

danger is remote, that it will not fail of recollecting itself; and exerting its utmost influence, when the same danger is directly impending.

In the third place, we may observe from the history now before us, the natural progress of sin, from one stage to another, till it arrives at a scandalous height of enormity; and, that when a man has once ventured beyond the limits of innocence, he can have no security, that he shall stop at the first offence, but may be hurried on to such wickedness, as, before, he would scarcely suppose himself to be capable of. St. Peter, we have seen, first began with prevarication, and with returning an ambiguous and evasive answer, when he was charged with being one of Christ's disciples; and by this, it is highly probable, he hoped to have delivered himself from the difficulty, in which he was involved: and little did he imagine, that his impiety and guilt would have proceeded so far, as to a direct denial of his master, and to open profaneness and blasphemy. But thus it was in fact; and thus it has been, in innumerable other instances. One act of vice, one indulgence of irregular passion, has not

only prepared the way to another, but led to the most excessive and unnatural wickedness. The examples are various, and the degrees of corruption various; but the treacherous, enslaving, infatuating nature of sin is delineated, in the strongest colours, in them all.

The mind of man is, by nature, so strongly attached to virtue, that it cannot become totally corrupted all at once. Some go on faster in the paths of vice, than others. But the entire corruption of the mind is, for the most part, a work of labour, and slow progression. Some softening must be used, to make vice appear tolerable; some artful colourings, to disguise, or hide, its native odiousness and deformity: and it requires time, thoroughly to silence the voice of conscience, and suppress all uneasy reflections.

The case, therefore, generally stands thus: men begin with representing sin, as a weakness and infirmity of nature, which a being of infinite goodness, who can have no emotions of revenge, and whose only end in the government of the world is the happiness of his creatures and subjects, will easily pardon, or, at least, not rigorously punish. Then they
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set themselves to invent salvoes, and plausible circumstances, to mitigate the guilt of their evil actions. And having by this means, rendered vice more familiar, and lessened that aversion and horror, which they before felt in their minds at the thought of it: having thus perverted and enslaved their judgment, and broken through that powerful restraint, the fear of God's displeasure; they will naturally proceed to greater degrees of licentiousness. The success of one vicious pursuit, or the pleasure that has attended it, will dispose them to wish for, and, consequently, easily incline them to, a repetition of the offence, till they are hardened beyond all sense of the evil of it: the authority of reason being weakened, and the tyranny of wild passion increased, by every irregular gratification.

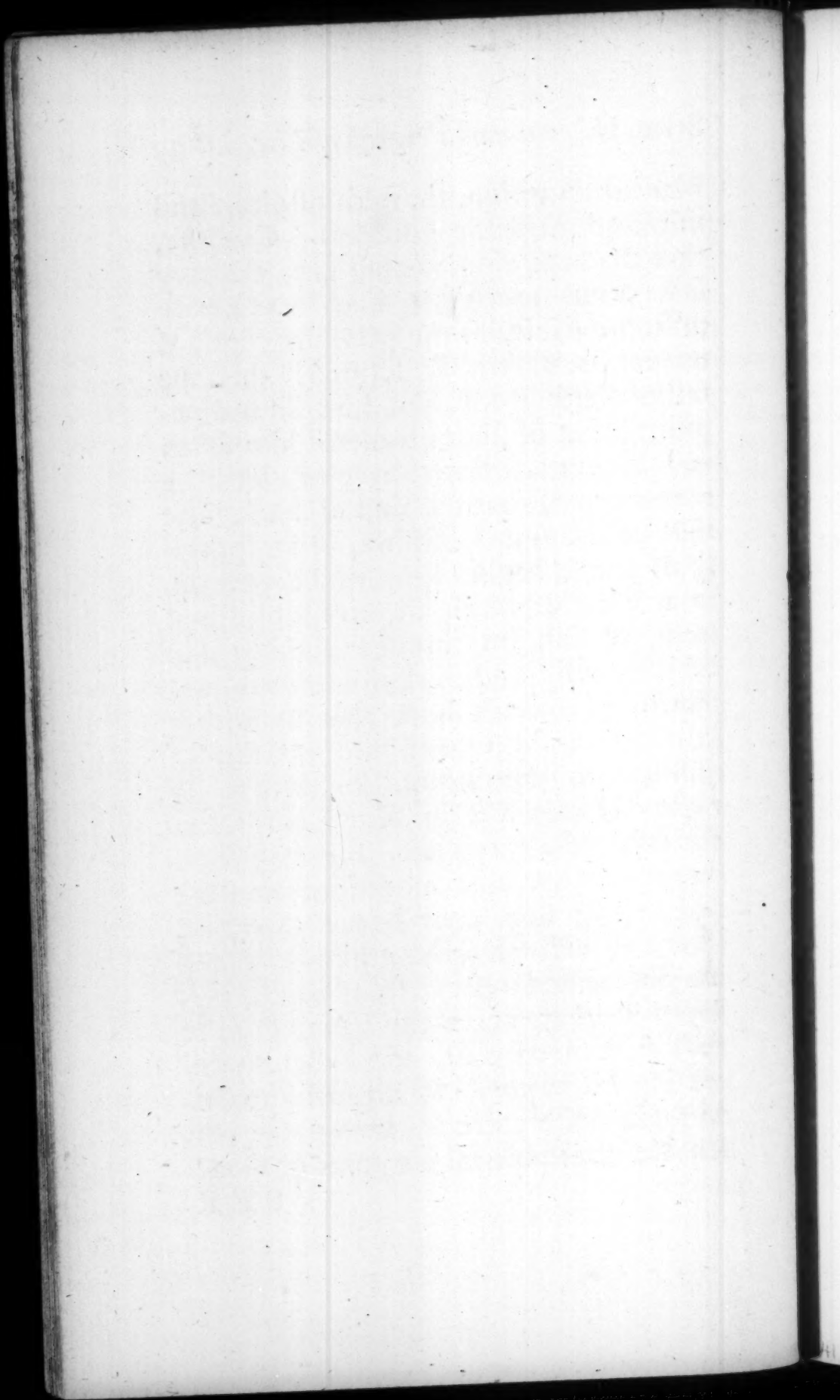
One vice will frequently call for another, to palliate and cover it; to render the gain of it more certain; or prevent interruption, and disturbance, in its false sophisticated pleasures; or to screen from the evil consequences, that, it may be justly apprehended, will follow upon it. And when men become habitually devoted to the practice of wickedness, and
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have no relish of sublimer exercises and enjoyments; especially, if they have so far conquered shame, as to commit public and notorious impiety; it is no wonder, if they defend it openly, and ridicule all attempts to expose their vices, as the effect of ignorance and enthusiasm: it is no wonder, if having, for a long time, deserted the paths of virtue, they see no beauty or agreeableness in them; or that being enslaved to vice, they should, for their own ease, endeavour to represent this foulest infamy and shame of human nature, under false and delusive appearances. This is the natural progress of a corrupted mind, from the first, and smaller instances of its depravation, till, at length, by offering continual violence to reason, it is so strangely blinded and stupified, as not to stick at the most detestable immoralities; and, in the elegant language of the Prophet, to “put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.”

Avoid, therefore, as a pestilential contagion, as poison and death to the soul, all the alluring insinuations of vice. Take heed of placing an undue confidence even in your virtues; endeavour to infuse, and plant

plant deep within, the ſeeds of piety, and univerſal chriſtian goodneſs. Conſider, that the ſame temptations, nay, the very ſame errors and vices, may have a very different effect, as the prevailing inward temper is differently formed: that the fall of Peter made him humble and penitent; that of Judas rendered him ſullen and deſperate. But, above all, let it be remembered, that the ruin of ſouls, like that of ſtates and empires, often ſprings from ſmall beginnings; which operate, in a great meaſure, imperceptibly, and ſeem, at firſt, to threaten nothing like ſuch a direful and moſt tremendous conſequence: and, in ſhort, that he who is hurried on, by unreſtrained exceſſes of paſſion, to the utmoſt boundaries of right; is like a man, that ſtands upon the edge of a precipice. He may look down, perhaps, without danger; but the firſt wrong ſtep, after he has proceeded thus far, will precipitate him headlong into ſhame and miſery: from which, perhaps, he may never riſe again, ſo as to appear with comfort, and a dignity becoming his nature, and his firſt appointed rank in the univerſe, among the reaſonable and immortal creatures of God!

S E R.



S E R M O N III.

ON HUMILITY.

I PETER V. 5.

And be clothed with humility.

IN discoursing upon this subject, I shall pursue the following method: First, I shall endeavour to explain the nature of Humility. Secondly, I shall lay before you some arguments to cultivate this virtue. And, lastly, point out the way to attain it.

Humility

Humility is the mean between pride, and abjectness of mind. A proud man thinks too highly ; an abject man, too meanly ; but the humble man, justly, concerning himself and what belongs to him. But those virtues that are situate between two extremes, have often a nearer resemblance to the one, than to the other of them. Thus, liberality lies between profuseness and avarice ; and yet it seems to be more distant from avarice, than from profuseness. In like manner, though humility is the mean between pride and abjectness of mind ; yet abjectness seems to approach nearer to humility, than pride does. Hence we frequently call the profuse, liberal, and the mean-spirited, humble ; but we scarce ever call the covetous, liberal, or the proud, humble : yet humility is quite different from mean-spiritedness, and very consistent with true magnanimity ; for as it is not the property of a great mind to think too highly of itself ; so neither of an humble mind, to value itself below its just and real worth.

We should be careful to avoid each of these errors ; keeping as far from mean-spiritedness, on the one hand, as from
pride

pride on the other. But whereas most men are apt to exceed, rather than fall short in their sentiments concerning themselves, we should guard most carefully against that extreme, to which our nature is most inclined. A humble man will be cautious of overlooking his defects, and of magnifying his virtues to himself; afraid lest the prejudices that cleave to self-love, should betray him into a vain opinion of his own excellence.

We may be humble and proud with regard to a variety of objects: with regard to external things, as birth, fortune, dress; or bodily advantages, as beauty and strength; or intellectual and moral endowments, as wit, knowledge, and virtue. Hence it is very possible we may be proud in some things, at the same time that we are humble in others. We may be humble with regard to outward appearance; when we are proud of our sense and religious improvements. Nay, we may be humble in all other respects, but proud of appearing humble and modest.

Humility requires, that we neither value ourselves highly on account of outward advantages, nor over-rate any real excel-

excellence, of which we are possessed. It implies, not only that we form a just and moderate estimation of our own merit; but also, that we do not prefer ourselves unreasonably to others. Many will confess their own imperfections, without reluctance, who yet, when comparisons are formed, cannot see, or will not own, that any body is equal or superior to themselves. Here then is the great trial, the best touch-stone of true humility; when it compares itself to others, it will do justice to their merit, as well as to its own; and assume to itself no pre-eminence over them, without just grounds. I say, without just grounds; for humility does not oblige a man, right or wrong, to give every one else the preference to himself. This indeed is quite impossible. A man, that has made some considerable advances in knowledge, cannot believe himself inferior, in that respect, to the ignorant multitude; nor the virtuous man, that he is not so good as those, whose lives are manifestly vicious and irregular. It is true, St. Paul directs, that "every man esteem others better than himself:" but the most this can signify, is, that a man should rather
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be partial to other men's virtues, than his own, and more favourable to their failings; that, where the odds are not considerable, his humility should turn the balance on their side: or perhaps the precept does not so much regard the inward act of esteem, as the modesty and condescension of our behaviour towards them.

Humility then implies in it these two things; that we entertain a just and moderate opinion of ourselves, and that we do not prefer ourselves unreasonably to others. As it consists in the sentiments and disposition of the mind, it is plain, it may be exercised in all ranks and conditions of life. Indeed, greatness is apt to beget pride; and adversity a humble mind; but there is no necessary connection between these things: for humility is often wanting in a low and depressed fortune, and sometimes found in persons that live in magnificence and splendor. It may subsist equally in a fine house, or a mean cottage; under a costly robe, or a threadbare coat.

This virtue expresseth itself in a variety of ways; in our appearance, discourse and behaviour to others: I might
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have added, in our looks and countenance; for no affections are more visible there, than pride and humility. "There is a generation," says Solomon, "O! how lofty are their eyes! and their eye-lids are lifted up;" and, I suppose, every one must have observed the difference between a modest, and supercilious air. Not that these things are infallible indications of the inward temper: for a proud man may easily put on the air of humility; and nature may have given such a cast to the countenance of a humble man, as proceeds in others from haughtiness of spirit.

With regard to the figure a man makes in the world, pride has two ways of expressing itself: the one high and natural; the other low and affected: the one by an extravagant ostentation of wealth and splendor; the other by pretending to despise all magnificence, and courting the fame of humility, by the meanness and singularity of its appearance. Thus a certain Philosopher once encountering some, that were dressed better than became them; see, said he, what pride is here! Afterwards observing others in mean and fordid habits below

low their rank; this too, said he, is pride, but of a different sort; though indeed he himself was deservedly rebuked for this latter kind of pride, which he so justly censured in others: for meeting by chance one of his acquaintance in a handsome dress, he rudely takes his mantle from his shoulder, and tramples it in the dirt, with these words, "Thus I trample upon your pride." "Yes, replied the other, And with a greater pride of thy own."

What has been said of dress, may be applied to a man's house, furniture, and the whole figure he makes. With regard to every thing of this nature, humility will teach us to be neither curious, nor negligent; avoiding with equal care a vain excess, and a mean affectation. It requires, that our appearance be moderate, and suitable to our rank and fortune. The humble man will consider his age, his abilities, his character, his function, and avoid whatever any of these would render indecent. He will observe such a moderation, as will shew, that he neither values himself, nor expects to be valued by others for these foreign ornaments;

ornaments ; nor will he despise merit, because it wants them.

In conversation, the humble man is not sullenly silent and reserved out of contempt of the company ; not talkative from a high opinion of his own sense : not so abject as to flatter others, nor so vain, as to love they should flatter him ; not obstinate in defending his opinions, nor forward to impose them, nor loth to acknowledge his mistakes. He learns willingly ; teaches without any assuming airs ; receives admonition, or gives it, with equal mildness and good nature. He will not talk much of himself, nor sound his own praise ; much less will he assume to himself the merit that is due to another. Yet humility does not oblige us to speak of ourselves with contempt. It is nothing but a ridiculous affectation, when a man says in his own dispraise, such things, as others believe, or he himself knows, to be false. And what most betrays the affectation is, the manifest disappointment of those persons, that most love to depreciate themselves, when others do not contradict them : a plain sign, that their censures of themselves, are

are only so many baits to catch the applause of others.

And as humility is not apt to commend itself, so neither to reflect upon others. It is not uneasy to hear them applauded; and if it censures their conduct, it is with some good intention, and not from any pleasure it takes in being censorious. Humility in its very nature is repugnant to envy; for we envy those most, who are possessed of advantages, which, we think, we deserve better than they. So that he who is not apt to prefer himself before others, (which is the character of the humble man) will upon that account be the less subject to envy them. Nor will he be prone to resentment; for it is a high opinion of ourselves, which gives the edge to affronts, and magnifies in our esteem the injuries we receive: wherefore true humility is always attended with meekness.

It will also shew itself in the modesty of our pursuits. It teacheth us to be content with the lot Heaven has assigned us, without murmuring, as if we did not think it so good as we deserve. A humble man has no ambitious desires of honour and distinction, and is not fond of

titles and precedence. If he does not meet with any extraordinary respect, he can still maintain his good humour; and does not quarrel with the world, as though it did not pay him the regard due to his merit. He aims not at things above his abilities; prefers a good to a great name; and could be content to spend his days in obscurity: not that he will decline an honourable station, in which he is qualified for being useful to mankind; but he will not seek it so much for the dignity that attends it, as for the opportunity it may give him to serve his generation: and if Providence calls him to a lower employment, he disdains it not, but chearfully pursues it.

But never is humility seen in a clearer light, never does it make a more engaging appearance, than in a man's treatment of others in the several stations and relations of life; in the exchange of benefits; and in his behaviour to his superiors, inferiors, and equals. If a proud man does you a favour, he commonly renders it, not only unacceptable, but odious by his insolence; first, by his arrogant air and expressions, at the time
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of bestowing it; and afterwards, by frequently reminding both you and others of the benefit he has conferred upon you. He treats you as one, whom he has made his slave; and expects so much gratitude and acknowledgment from you, that he really deserves none at all. But the humble man doubles the kindness he does you by the gracefulness of his manner. You see no supercilious airs; you hear no insolent words; he studies rather to extenuate, than magnify the benefit: he treats you with no less, if not with greater deference after than before; lest you should imagine he claims any superiority over you on the score of the kindnesses you have received from him. He boasts not to others of the obligation he has laid upon you, nor upbraids you with it; but leaves you to remember or forget, to publish or conceal it, as you are grateful or not.

Such is the difference between pride and humility, in bestowing favours. Let us next consider it in the case of receiving them. A proud man hates to be obliged; he accepts a benefit with a sullen disdain: and seems displeased, that you should have had it in your power to do him a

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kindness. He is loth to acknowledge it, and soon loses the remembrance of what is so disagreeable and mortifying to him. Besides, he is apt to be ungrateful upon this further account; he thinks every thing is due to his merit; and therefore whatever service you do him, he regards it as a debt you were bound in justice to pay: and commonly he is not so much pleased with what you have done for him, as disobliged, that your favours were not proportioned to that desert which he fancies in himself. On the contrary, a humble man, as he entertains no extravagant opinions of his own dignity, readily imputes the service you do to him, to your own generosity and good will. He is willing to be, and to own himself obliged; loves the sight of his benefactor; and suffers not any ambitious desire of greater favours to stifle his gratitude for those he has received.

With regard to our superiors, humility requires, that we do not affect an equality with them; nor press upon their rank; nor think ourselves ill used, if they do not treat us with extraordinary condescension. That we neither thrust ourselves forwardly upon, nor shun them, out of an affected contempt, or an envious uneasiness

easiness to see others excel us. If they are placed above us in civil stations, we should cheerfully submit to their authority; and pay them all that regard which is due, though not perhaps to their personal character, yet to the dignity with which the laws have invested them. A superiority also in point of fortune, when it is not sullied with vile and profligate manners, justly demands from us a respectful behaviour. And as to such as outshine us in wisdom and virtue, humility will teach us not to envy and detract from their merit; but to rejoice in their advantages, and honour them in full proportion to their excellence. Thus the humble person entertains a becoming deference for his superiors; which will shew itself, not in sordid flattery, and mean compliances, but in the ingenuous expressions of a just and manly respect.

Towards our equals, humility requires that we carry it as equals, in a friendly obliging manner, free from all affectation of superiority and pre-eminence.

Lastly; With respect to our inferiors, humility will teach us to avoid all insolence of behaviour; and abstain from whatever looks like unmercifulness and
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oppression. A humble man will not vaunt himself in his superiority over others; he will shrink down, as it were, to a level with his inferiors; and study rather to conceal, than display those advantages, the sight of which would answer no other end, but to put them out of conceit with themselves and their own condition. In a civil station, he will not indeed prostitute the dignity of his office by mean condescensions; but he will conduct himself with such moderation, as may shew he challenges respect, not so much to his person as to his place and character. If he excels you in sense and virtue, instead of making his good qualities a reason for treating you with contempt, he regards them only as so many obligations upon himself to be serviceable to you. He instructs with mildness, and reproves with gentleness and simplicity; not upbraiding you with your defects, nor setting off his own superior wisdom.

He esteems no mortal below his regard, because heaven has placed him in a lower rank. On the contrary, he makes every man, whom vice and guilt has not debased, his brother and his equal, as far

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as is consistent with the necessary distinctions of human society. Hence he is affable, easy of access, courteous and condescending. The ambitious indeed will be all this to gain favour and applause; but the humble man upon different principles. His good nature, and not his vanity, leads him to take notice of his inferiors; he observes, they are pleased with such condescensions; and the meanness of their fortunes will not prevent him from performing those offices, by which he can give them an innocent pleasure, or do them a real service.

After this manner does humility express itself with regard to mankind. If we consider it with relation to the Divine Being, it implies, that we be duly sensible of the immense distance between God and us; of his infinite perfection, and our own insignificance, in comparison of him: it will teach us to adore him in all lowliness of mind; and ever to esteem the favours we receive from him, greater, and the afflictions less, than our own desert. It requires, that we submit cheerfully to his commands, and embrace with entire satisfaction whatever he sees good to order concerning us; in all things

making his will our own: persuaded, that he is fitter to choose our circumstances for us, than we for ourselves: in short, that we behave towards him in all respects, as one that is infinitely superior to us in every kind of perfection.

Thus I have endeavoured to explain the nature of humility, and described it at large in its properties and effects. And from the whole it appears, that humility is not, as some may conceive, a low and despicable qualification. One would think indeed no mortal could regard it in this light, who had not first mistaken its nature; for what can be more becoming a rational being, than to make a just estimation of itself and its endowments? What more worthy of a man, than to maintain a supreme deference to the best and greatest of beings, who infinitely excels him; and a humane regard to his fellow-creatures, in the several ranks which Providence assigns them? What, on the contrary, could be more dishonourable, than to be puffed up with a groundless opinion of our own merit, which betrays itself in a haughty ungenerous behaviour? The truth of it is, humility, not only is consistent with real greatness

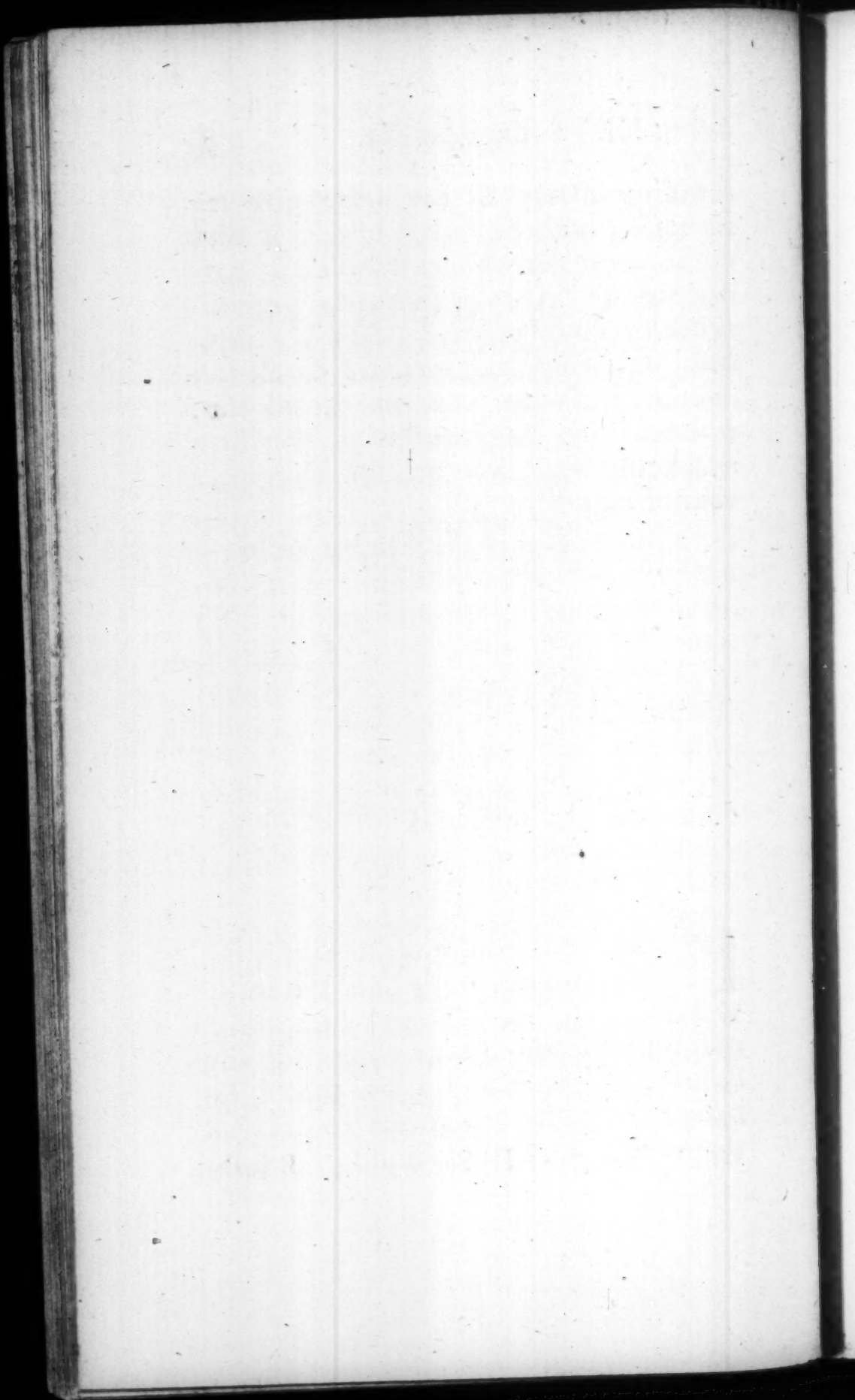
greatness of mind, but a qualification, without which, all pretensions to true magnanimity are false and groundless.

From what has been said concerning the nature of humility, we may learn; first, not to condemn others for the want of it, without good reason. Uncharitable censures of this kind are but too common in the world. Some will reflect upon you, as haughty and supercilious, merely because nature may have given such a cast to your countenance, as may sometimes proceed from insolence of temper. Others will condemn you as proud, because you will not indulge their vanity, by meanly flattering and fawning upon them. And there are many, who seem to think every man is proud, that makes a better appearance, and lives in a more splendid manner than themselves; though only in proportion to his own fortune. But such things as these may very possibly consist with true humility; and are not half such certain indications of a proud heart, as to be censorious upon others on account of them. A humble man will be ready to suspect his own heart, if he finds such marks of pride upon himself; but not so apt

to censure others, in whom he observes them, because in that case they must be to him doubtful and ambiguous.

From what has been said we may learn also in the second place, what improvements we ourselves have made in humility. To satisfy me that I am possessed of this excellent virtue, it is not enough that I speak modestly of myself, and choose to be plain in my outward appearance; for this I may do from the pride of my heart, in order to gain the reputation of humility: but do I value myself highly, and expect to be admired by others on the account of any outward circumstances? Do I fairly estimate my own worth, and not lightly think myself wiser and better than my neighbours? Am I warm in my resentments; or envious toward such as are preferred before me? Do I desire that men should treat me with uncommon respect; or am I vexed and disappointed, when they do not? Am I not loth to allow others their due praise, and pleased when I hear myself unjustly commended? In the commerce of life, am I not apt to think my friends more obliged to me, than I am to them? Am I willing

I willing to pay all due honour to my superiors, without being uneasy if they do not treat me with extraordinary condescension? Do I assume no pre-eminence over my equals? , Am I courteous, equitable and merciful to all my inferiors? When you can do all this, without being too proud of it, you may reasonably hope, you are not altogether void of humility.



S E R M O N I V .

ON HUMILITY.

1 PETER V. 5.

And be clothed with humility.

IN a former discourse upon this subject, I endeavoured to explain the nature of Humility, that we might learn not to mistake it in ourselves or others. It now follows, in the second place, that I lay before you some arguments to cultivate this virtue. And what should principally recommend

recommend it to us, is, the amiableness of it; which may appear, in some measure, from the foregoing description. If there are any, who regard it as a low qualification, we must in charity suppose, that this is chiefly owing to their ignorance of its nature: they call mean-spiritedness, humility; and then despise the name, while they cannot but approve and esteem the thing itself: for what can be more becoming us, than to make a just and moderate estimation of ourselves and our endowments? What more laudable than to be free from insolence and vanity, than to be modest in our appearance, pursuits, discourse, and behaviour? What more worthy of a man, than to entertain a supreme deference for the wisest and best of beings, who infinitely excels him; and a humane regard for all his fellow-creatures, in the several ranks which Providence assigns them?

If such be the nature of humility, it cannot but appear highly honourable to every one that has any tolerable sense of what is excellent and praise-worthy. It does not indeed make such a dazzling shew as some other virtues, which look somewhat suspicious, because they seem to
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court observation ; but to a discerning eye, it appears no less engaging and beautiful, even one of the most lovely accomplishments of human minds. Other virtues lose much of their splendor, when they are not attended with humility. Pride tarnishes the best actions and the noblest endowments ; but humility adds fresh lustre to a man's good qualities, and makes him derive honour and dignity from his very defects. Hence we may see the propriety of the Apostle's expression, when he directs that we be clothed with humility ; intimating, that as we study to make the body decent by outward dress, so we should be careful to adorn the mind with the inward habit of humility ; with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit : in comparison of which all outward ornaments, are trivial and contemptible.

And as humility is amiable in itself, so it is also very beneficial in its effects : it will contribute not a little to the peace and chearfulness of our minds, to which there is no greater enemy than pride. A proud man burns continually with ambitious desires, and is ever anxious to gain
honour

honour and admiration. He expects the world should regard him according to the figure he makes in his own eyes; and when some through wisdom, others out of malice, deny him that respect which he arrogates to himself, he is greatly mortified. If therefore we would not be devoured by fretfulness and spleen, we must not entertain extravagant ideas of our own merit, nor insist upon more reverence from the world than it is willing to pay. True contentment dwells with humility, and cannot subsist without it. He that is possessed of this virtue will be little concerned about the appearance he makes in the world, and therefore he can be easy and satisfied in a low condition. He is not ambitious of being honoured and observed; and if mankind think proper to deny him their respect, this is no disappointment to him: let them use their pleasure, he can still enjoy himself and be chearful.

In the next place, humility is advantageous with regard to a man's fortune. Not that it will render him meanly saving; but it will restrain him from living above his income, and wasting his substance in pomp and prodigality. It will also teach him

him not to disdain any just and lawful employment, by which he may support himself, and advance his fortune. But there are different advantages arising from humility, according to the various objects upon which it is exercised. If we are humble with regard to our appearance, we shall be content to want a thousand expensive articles, and escape a heavy tax, which the vanity of others imposes upon them. If we entertain a modest opinion of our knowledge and virtue, we are in the best disposition for improving them by our own study, and the assistance of others. If we are humble in our behaviour to our fellow-creatures, we shall scarce fail of winning their love and respect.

To the generality of mankind there is no vice more offensive than pride; no virtue more engaging than humility. Those that want the favour of the people as a step to their own advancement, are commonly sensible of this; and therefore upon occasions, when it concerns them to be popular, they can vouchsafe to dissemble their usual insolence, and assume the most winning airs of courtesy and condescension. To be further convinced how apt humility is to conciliate goodwill,

will, we need only attend to the common people, when they are praising their greatest favourites : such an one, they say, is a humble man, or he has no pride in him. This is often the first, and, in their opinion, the highest commendation. And indeed I believe they only speak what others think ; for every man loves humility in his neighbour. But it is surprising that, in the common course of life, we should be so careless of recommending ourselves to others, by that which never fails to recommend others so powerfully to us.

Without humility, friendship cannot well be formed, nor subsist with any tolerable steadiness. Pride is apt to slight and over-look its friends ; on which side soever it lies, it aggravates an affront, and makes even favours odious in the sense of those that receive them ; and if honour is proposed, it will abuse and trample upon its best friends, in order to come at it. Hence competition, jealousy, contention, the entire dissolution of love, which is commonly succeeded by irreconcilable animosity. Besides, true friendship is of so delicate a nature, that it cannot walk but upon even ground ;
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he therefore, that will always affect a superiority, either upon account of rank, fortune, merit, or obligations, will meet with hearty and constant esteem from few of his acquaintance. Such a one may have plenty of slaves and parasites from among the dregs of mankind; but he will have the mortification to see men of worth and sense declining his friendship, which is not to be had but upon servile conditions. If we think to enter into a thorough friendship with any man, we must place ourselves entirely upon a level with him, and claim no mastery over him upon any account; or else our friendship will be of no long continuance, unless he be a servile, mean-spirited person.

And as the virtue I am now recommending, is necessary to the stricter intimacies of private friendship, so it is of great force to procure us the goodwill of our acquaintance in general.

True humility, in which there is nothing abject, slavish, or fawning, wins upon all observers; and especially upon those to whom it is exercised. If we are courteous and obliging to our equals, we shall gain their friendship; our superiors
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will give us their favour, in return for our respect; and our inferiors their respect, in return for our favour. But if the haughtiness of our minds will not suffer us to comply with these terms, we shall assuredly want the esteem of our fellow-creatures; which, if we despise at present, we may wish hereafter we had taken more pains to secure. I own, it is mean to make the good report and affection of mankind our principal end; but to neglect it altogether is no sign either of prudence or virtue.

Humility is not only beloved of men, but which is a much more important consideration, it is an ornament of great price, in the sight of Almighty God. With this argument the Apostle enforceth the exhortation in my text: "be cloth-
"ed with humility; for God resisteth the
"proud, and giveth grace to the hum-
"ble." This should engage us, not merely to counterfeit the outward appearance of humility, which can be of no service to us with regard to God; but to cherish this virtue in our own hearts, which lie constantly open to his inspection. To encourage us herein, "the
"high and lofty one, who inhabits eter-
"nity,

“ nity, and dwells in the high and holy
“ place;” even he has declared, that
“ with that man also will he dwell, who
“ is of a contrite and humble spirit, to
“ revive the spirit of the humble, and
“ to revive the heart of the contrite
“ ones.”

Christianity also lays us under very strong obligations to cultivate a humble disposition. The great Author of it was himself a noble pattern of humility; and it is hard to say, whether he has recommended this virtue more powerfully to us by his own example, or by the precepts he has left us: but both conspire to place it in the most engaging light, and press it upon us in the strongest manner. In his parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, how amiable does humility appear in the one, “ who, “ standing afar off, and not lifting up so “ much as his eyes unto heaven, smote “ upon his breast, and said, God be merciful unto me, a sinner!” Especially when compared with the pride of the Pharisee, who stood boasting of his merit to his Maker, and confidently preferring himself before his fellow-creature. Again, when his disciples were contend-
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ing for pre-eminence, "Jesus called a
"little child unto him, and set him in
"the midst of them, and said, verily I
"say unto you, except ye be converted
"from this spirit of ambition, and be-
"come as humble as little children, ye
"shall not enter into the kingdom of hea-
"ven." Our Saviour did not teach what he
did not practise : he condescended even
to wash the feet of his disciples, with this
particular view, that he might teach us
by his example to be humble in our be-
haviour towards one another. "Ye call
me," says he, "Master and Lord, and ye
"say well; for so I am: if I then, your
"Lord and Master, have washed your
"feet, ye ought also to wash one ano-
"ther's feet: for I have given you an
"example, that ye should do as I have
"done unto you." But indeed the whole
life of Christ, was one continued lesson
of humility; and certainly in those, who
profess to be followers of the meek and
lowly Jesus, nothing can be more inde-
cent than pride; nothing more becoming
than lowliness of mind.

In the gospel, "no virtue has more
"frequent promises made to it of a glo-
"rious reward, than humility. Blessed
"are

“are the poor in spirit,” says our Saviour,
“for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

By which we are not to understand, that one single virtue will qualify us for heaven; but humility is so closely connected with the other virtues, and leads so necessarily to them, that where this prevails in full perfection, the rest cannot be wanting. A man, that is thoroughly humble, will of course be submissive to God, and obedient to his commands; he will be sober, mild, equitable, and merciful: and whoever is thus humble is truly blessed; because he is entitled to the happiness of God’s heavenly kingdom. One would think it might persuade us all to lay aside insolence and pride, and aspire after unfeigned humility in heart and life, when we are assured from the greatest authority, that the time will shortly come, when he that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

I proceed now, in the third and last place, to point out the method we should take, in order to attain this excellent virtue. The great point is, to know ourselves; and form a just estimation of our own worth, that we neither swell with
vanity,

vanity, nor sink into mean-spiritedness. And the way to know this, is to study ourselves with impartiality and diligence, to examine our conduct, to descend into our hearts, and search narrowly those hidden recesses, into which none can enter besides God and ourselves. But we are most of us apt to exceed, rather than to fall short in our sentiments concerning ourselves: and we should guard with the greatest caution against that error, to which our nature is most inclined.

That we may be humble with regard to our sense and virtue, we should frequently attend to the mistakes we have been guilty of, to the blindness of our minds, and the faults and errors we are every day committing. We should consider well, how often perverse dispositions prevail in our hearts, and betray us into indecencies of discourse and behaviour; how weak we find our good resolutions, how easy to be overcome by a pressing temptation, and what a great mixture of selfishness and vanity there commonly is in those actions for which men commend us, and for which we are apt to applaud ourselves: we should pursue these reflections with the utmost ingenuity and care,
afraid

afraid lest our hearts should deceive us into a vain opinion of our own excellence.

Whatever good qualities we may possess, we should be mindful from whence they were derived to us: perhaps we had never attained them, had it not been for the instructions and counsels of our fellow-creatures. Be that as it will, it is certain, the little excellence we have, “descended from above, from the Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift.” We have no good which he has not wrought in us; we have done no good which he did not give us the power to perform. In short, we can boast of nothing but what we have received, of nothing but what ought to remind us of our dependence and obligations. Every degree of virtue, every valuable endowment we owe to the free goodness of God, who bestowed them upon us; not to fill us with vanity, but that with them we should glorify his name, and serve our generation.

If we accustom ourselves to these reflections, they may keep us from being proud of our virtuous and religious improvements. With regard to rank and fortune, we should consider, that these things do not render any

man at all the more excellent; that they are frequently enjoyed by the vilest of mankind; that wealth is precarious; and that death will soon put an end to all outward distinctions. Nor shall we be lifted up at the thought of a little fame and reputation, if we reflect, that this depends upon the opinions of men, than which, the winds are not more uncertain; that they, who commend us, know in comparison but little of us; and that both we, who are praised, and they who praise us must soon die and sink into oblivion. As to advantages of body, such as beauty and strength, we should remember, that a flower excels us in the one, and a brute in the other; and that a fit of sickness may, or else age and death certainly will deprive us of them both. And indeed with regard to all outward things, if we are duly sensible how mean they are in their own nature, how liable to change, decay, and corruption, how precarious and short in their continuance, we shall be ashamed to value ourselves highly upon them. Our pride is wholly owing to our stupidity and ignorance; and, in proportion as we improve in good sense,

sense, we shall also improve in lowliness of mind.

But it is not enough that we entertain a moderate opinion of ourselves; for, to compleat the character of humility, it is also required that we do justice to others, when we consider ourselves in comparison with them. In order to attain this branch of humility, we should often call to mind in how many respects we agree with the rest of mankind. "We are all the offspring of one and the same Parent, partake of the same nature, have the like flesh and blood;" the like reason, sense, and affections, and are equally subject to accidents and death. And shall we despise any human creature, who resembles us so nearly; who is of the same family with ourselves, and whom nature has placed upon a level with us in so many important respects? Again, in those instances wherein we differ from our fellow-creatures, we should be careful not to overlook their merit, and our own defects; nor to magnify their defects, and our own merit. Is your fortune superior to your neighbour's? Perhaps he excels you in sense and discretion. You think you are a wiser

man than he; not to say, you judge in your own cause, perhaps you are inferior to him in humility and virtue. He has some faults, from which you are free; and is not he free from some faults, of which you are guilty? Your friends have given you some cause to be displeased; and do you think your friends have not many things to excuse in you? You have laid them under great obligations; but possibly they have performed services for you of equal importance, or would have done so, had it been in their power. If, laying aside all foolish prepossessions in our own favour, we should learn to weigh these things in the fair and equal balance of reason, it might go a great way towards curing us of our insolence, and forming in us the habits of humility.

When our observation is confined to such as are below us, we are apt to swell with vanity and pride; but it will help to check this humour, if we turn our eyes now and then towards those that excel us, and compare ourselves impartially with them. If I am superior to some of my fellow-creatures, there are others as much superior to me in the same respects.

spects. And it is plain, whatever treatment I may reasonably desire from those above me, the same I owe to such as are below me. There is therefore a good deal of sense in what is commonly said, that we should go out into the world, in order that we may learn to know ourselves. For though it may seem somewhat strange, that a man should go abroad to get acquainted with himself; yet if no man truly knows himself, who is not free from arrogance and vanity, it is certain this is no improper method to attain that most useful and necessary science. Pride is most apt to grow in the shade, and flourishes wonderfully in a recluse life, where men seldom converse with any thing better than themselves. But when we enlarge our views, and find in the world many that outshine us far in those very things of which we are proud; this, or nothing, will teach us to be humble and modest.

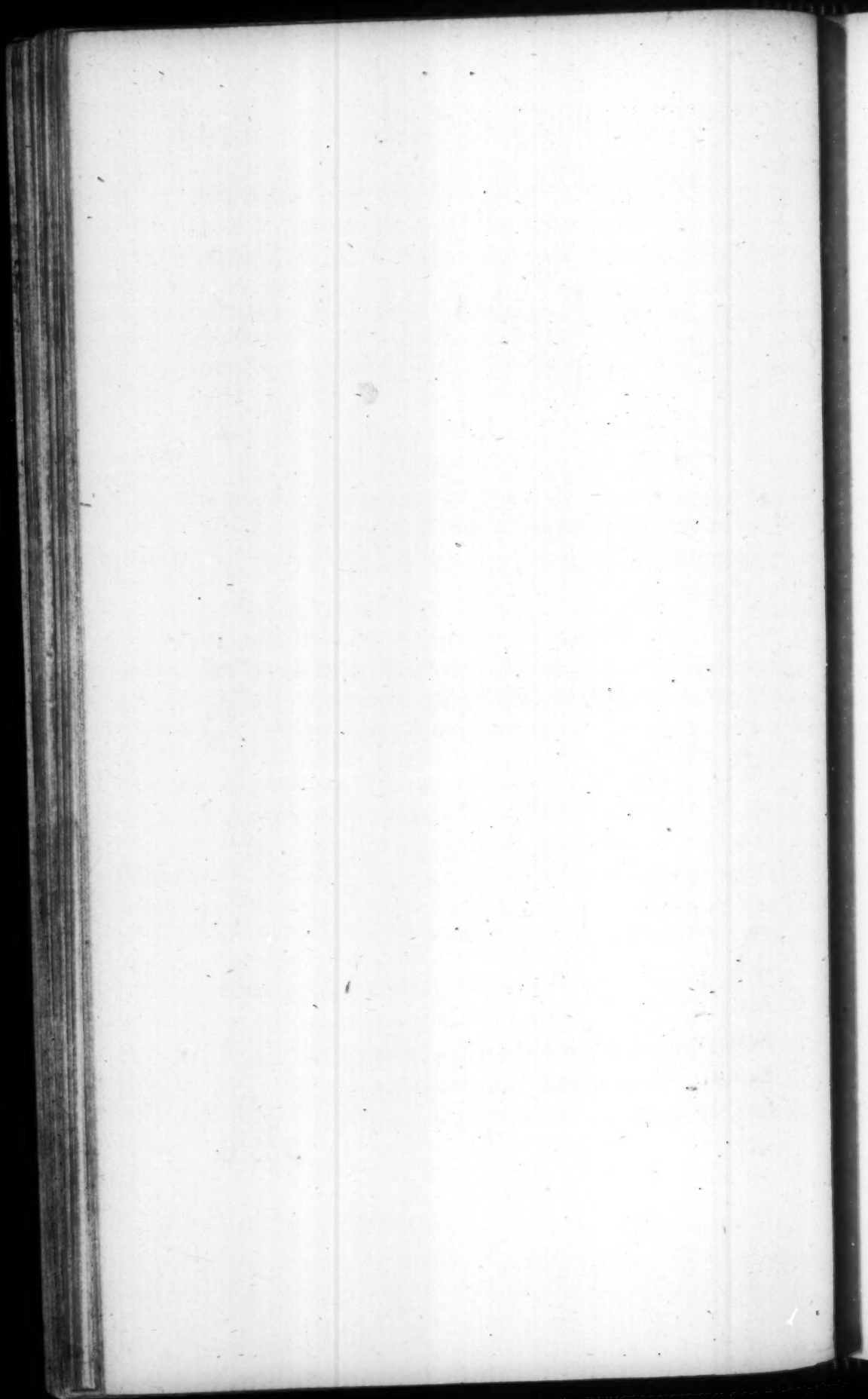
If your office or profession is more honourable than that of your neighbour; yet his may be equally useful to the world, and even necessary to your own support. And it would ill become you to despise or insult any man for the mean-

ness of his station, who diligently pursues any just employment, that is calculated for promoting the lowest interest of mankind. All the parts of human society, whether less or more honourable, have a mutual dependence among themselves, like the members of the same body; and therefore ought to maintain a mutual regard and value for each other: high and low, rich and poor, are bound together by reciprocal ties. None of the ranks of life can well subsist without the rest; and each by different ways are subservient to the common good. You are not the head, perhaps; but suppose you were: "The head cannot say to the hands, I have no need of you; nor to the feet, I have no need of you." God, who appoints to every man his station, placed you where you are; not that you should treat your inferiors as your slaves; but that you should employ your ability in protecting and cherishing them. This is the generous and manly part: this is the end for which he gave you the pre-eminence; and you will degrade yourself, and forfeit his favour, whenever you act contrary to it.

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Did we often revolve such sentiments in our minds, they would gradually work in us a humble disposition. It will also be of service, if we attend to those of our acquaintance, whose lives are adorned with this lovely accomplishment. From their examples we may best learn the amiableness of humility, and shall pass insensibly from love to imitation.

To all this we should add, sincere prayer to Almighty God the fountain of goodness, that he would succeed our endeavours, and clothe us with unfeigned humility: or, in the words of the Son of Sirach: "O Lord, Father and God of my life, give me not a proud look; but turn away from thy servant always a haughty mind."



S E R M O N V.

ON THE LOVE OF ENEMIES.

MATTHEW V. 44.

But I say unto you, love your enemies.

MOST evident it is, that the actions and qualities of men are in their own nature widely different; and not only different, but oftentimes contrary to each other. Good and evil, virtue and vice, are essentially as opposite as pain and
E 5 pleasure,

pleasure, light and darkness. If therefore some actions and qualities are necessarily approved; others must necessarily be disapproved: if some are naturally amiable; others must be naturally odious. And since our faculties can neither alter their proper objects, nor make them appear otherwise than they are; they must needs affect our minds accordingly. It is not then in our power to approve base actions, or be pleased with vicious characters. More particularly, if men are unjust and injurious; we cannot possibly esteem them as such. On the contrary, we must unavoidably dislike and condemn them in that respect. And supposing this to be the case of our enemies; we cannot love them, in this sense of the word; nor, by consequence, be required so to do. It is a contradiction to nature and reason, that we should think well of them; or regard them with esteem and complacency. We may indeed and ought to acknowledge and value such good qualities as they are really possessed of; but considered as unreasonable and injurious, we must dislike and disesteem them, and cannot do otherwise. We cannot see other men wronged and ill-used
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without a sensible displeasure; and we never fail to blame the authors of it. But when such wrongs are done to ourselves, and we feel them as well as see them; there is still a greater necessity for blaming and condemning the doers of them.

By that love then which is required towards our enemies, we are not to understand the love of esteem or complacency, which in some respects is unreasonable and impossible; but that of benevolence or good-will. An unfeigned affection prompting us to wish well to all mankind, whatever their deserts or demerits may be; and disposing us to do such good offices as come fairly within our power, even to our enemies: to return good for evil, kindnesses for injuries, benefits for provocations: to endeavour sincerely to promote their welfare, without regard to character or conduct; and to remember the obligations of humanity and charity even to those who notoriously violate both: in short, however we may blame their actions, condemn their behaviour, and detest their proceedings; to seek their good nevertheless, and cordially to consult their advantage. This is

not only practicable, but strictly conformable to the rules of right reason, as will be shewn afterwards. In the mean time it plainly appears, not only from the nature of the thing, but from those beneficent acts, and kind offices, specified in the words following my text, that the duty here required is to be thus understood. For no mention do we find of any thing signifying approbation, good opinion, esteem, or complacency; but only of such things as are the natural fruits and effects of sincere benevolence. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." And this explanation is further confirmed in the verse following, which refers us to the example and imitation of our heavenly Father. For though God is kind and gracious to all; showering down his blessings, without distinction, on the "just and on the unjust;" yet the latter are ever displeasing and offensive to him, and the objects of his just indignation. He is bountiful to the wicked, his professed enemies; but his favour and esteem they can never obtain: so far from
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it, that they are an abomination to him, and their ways detestable in his sight. If they continue such, they will finally be destroyed; but at the same time, God is so far from having pleasure in their death and destruction; that he earnestly seeks their recovery, and desires their welfare. So plain, and just, and necessary, is the distinction before us, between that love which consists in benevolence, and that which consists in complacency and esteem. And yet by confounding and mixing these ideas, we are very apt to entertain wrong notions of this duty; to misrepresent it to ourselves and others, and magnify the difficulty of putting it in practice. In short, as men appear to us in their actions and characters, so we must unavoidably think of them; and if we judge of them according to truth, equity, and candor, we are so far acquitted. But whatever their actions and conduct may be; whatever grounds we may find for esteem or disesteem; whether they be just, or injurious; peaceable, or turbulent; kind, or cruel; we are bound to wish them well, and to make use of all proper means, methods, and opportunities, of befriending them.

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Let it be further observed, that however the precept in the text be understood; it evidently disallows, and utterly excludes, all kinds of revenge and retaliation. That fixed principle of benevolence, that constant disposition to do good, which are manifestly implied in it, cannot possibly admit of any purposes or intentions of doing evil, on any occasion, or any provocation. It is true indeed, that neither the prevention, nor the reparation of injuries are inconsistent with this divine rule. As we may innocently and reasonably guard against them, so we may lawfully propose due satisfaction; provided we aim at nothing further than righting ourselves, without any malicious view, or revengeful design. We are allowed to provide for our own safety, and preserve our own just rights; and may make use of such means as are requisite for these ends: but repairing of injuries is one thing, and returning them another. The one is perfectly consistent with the benevolence here required; the other a direct violation of it. I add, that however we may fail of obtaining reparation; this will justify no degree of ill-will; much less any thoughts or intentions

tions of revenge. For as our duty has no dependence on any such events; so neither is our disposition to be influenced by them.

Our benevolent affections, and good offices, are not then to be obstructed by injuries and ill-treatment. We see our enemies are entitled to our good-will, even when they have lost their own. Their conduct, be it what it will, cannot alter our rule, nor cancel our obligations; which require us to be well-affected towards the greatest evil doers, and ever ready to promote their good. We are not bound indeed to set enemies on a level with friends. Equal measures of benevolence cannot be due; neither are they required: but however it may differ in degree, or whatever precedence be allowed; it must be extended to the former as well as the latter, and demonstrated in act and deed on all proper occasions. Neither the engagements of friendship, nor proximity of blood, must engross our affections and good offices; which are due, in proportion, to every part of mankind, enemies not excepted.

To make this appear, I shall proceed to shew briefly the grounds of this duty,
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and the obligations incumbent on us to observe and practise it. This, I think, will be sufficiently done, by setting forth the reasonableness, the excellence, and the advantage of it. For on these grounds, enforced by divine authority, the duty stands; and from thence our obligations arise. Of the reasonableness of this duty there would be little or no occasion for proof; were not men so prone to consult their passions, instead of their understandings. For most evident it is, that returning injuries for injuries, enmity for enmity, can never possibly be justified to the impartial reason of our own minds. Have ill offices been done us? Have we been hardly used, and injuriously treated, without provocation, and without cause? Be it supposed; what follows? Doubtless we may justly blame and condemn such proceedings. But what then? If others have acted wrongfully; can this be a reason for our acting foolishly? If they have been unreasonable and perverse, must we needs follow their example? To do evil designedly, on any occasion, is undoubtedly folly at least, because it means nothing; that is, nothing but mischief; which, of itself, can never be
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a rational motive. If it were only acting in vain, and to no end; it would be manifestly absurd: but it goes further; it is acting to a bad purpose, and producing an effect worse than nothing. It is not only lost labour, and fruitless employment; but is really going backwards, and counterworking the ends of nature and Providence. In short, it is doing that very thing, which a wise man will always endeavour to prevent, as far as lies in his power. For what can be more agreeable to reason and wisdom, than to keep evil, as much as possible, out of the world; and when it is in, to use all proper means to drive it out? Instead of this, as enmity lets it in; so revenge keeps it there, and propagates it. The one opens a door for it; and the other holds it open and widens it.

But perhaps it may be said, that returning of injuries does promote a real end, and that a desirable one; forasmuch as it gratifies a natural passion. I answer, that nature disowns any such passion. The passion truly natural, is universal benevolence; to answer which, is the noblest gratification; and to obstruct it, the greatest detriment. And though anger
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be truly natural, yet it never was intended for any such purpose. The true use and intent of it, are the repelling of injuries; not the revenging of them. And whenever that affection carries men this length, it is always grossly corrupted. It may be further urged, that all injuries and wilful wrongs are actions of ill desert, and criminal in their own nature; and, by consequence, ought in reason and equity to be punished accordingly. Be this allowed; such actions are indeed justly punishable: but by whom? Not by us; who neither know how to do it; nor have any right to undertake it: but by Him surely, "to whom vengeance belongeth;" and who alone is qualified to execute it rightly. Besides, this is a dangerous plea, and may easily recoil upon our own heads. If we insist rigorously on the punishment of all wrongs and indignities; do we not, in effect, pass sentence against ourselves? For have we not all frequently and grievously offended the Divine Majesty? And do we not therefore continually stand in need of his mercy and forgiveness? On this account, we ought to take special care that we do not preclude our only plea, and overturn the
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the foundation of all our hopes. Especially since we are assured, that "what measure we mete" to our fellow-creatures, will be measured to us again by our common Creator, and supreme Judge.

Moreover ; Benevolence and humanity are always reasonable ; and, by consequence, ever due to the whole species. Whenever we have a fair opportunity of doing good, it is always fit to be done ; nor can any thing release us from the obligation. To communicate and promote happiness, is certainly acting to the best purpose, and producing the most worthy effects that we are capable of. Whatever wrongs we may have sustained ; they can never be returned in kind without a violation of our own duty, and a participation of our enemies' guilt ; nor indeed without doing wrong to ourselves, and debasing the dignity of our nature. In short, right reason can never consent to the doing of evil ; nor allow men to decline doing good, when fit opportunities offer. However they may be injured or provoked ; the rule of truth remains the same, and must be observed. Passion is a blind guide ; and unless it be checked and controlled by reason, is sure to

to lead them astray, and involve them in guilt and misery.

I proceed to consider the excellence of this duty. Though all duties are reasonable; yet they may not be, neither are they, of equal dignity. General benevolence is general virtue; the true principle of a rational mind, and the great support and ornament of society. But in benevolence towards enemies there is additional worth, peculiar grace and glory. This raises men's minds, and exalts their affections to the sublimest pitch. It is not only excellent, as it is less common and more difficult than other virtues; but as it is in itself intrinsically great and god-like. It denotes in a particular manner the liberty, the power, the prerogative of the mind; the dominion of reason, and the conquest of passion. It denotes good order and government of spirit; a sacred regard to truth, and an invincible affection for peace: for peace both within and without, public and private; for establishing the tranquillity of a man's own breast, maintaining the harmony of the world, and promoting the glory of its great Governor. But the excellence of this virtue more especially appears from

from its peculiar conformity to the divine example. By loving and befriending our enemies, we become imitators of God's universal goodness; and in the noblest sense, "children of our Father which is in heaven;" who, as we read in the verse following the text, "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." His blessings are scattered promiscuously, and without distinction, on friends and enemies, the righteous and the wicked. And not only the common blessings of life are thus communicated; but for us all, even "while we were sinners, and when we were enemies," he graciously provided the means of reconciliation and redemption, and "sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." And what a pattern has our Redeemer likewise set us of this divine virtue? He has shewn greater love, and greater friendship to his enemies, than any other person ever did, or ever could do, even to the dearest friends: to enemies fierce and cruel, obstinate and implacable; and who impiously deprived him of that life, which was both employed, and laid down, for their sakes. In a word, for his enemies

mies he lived and died ignominiously, and wretchedly; in pain and poverty, misery and torment. Thus was his precept fully exemplified in his own practice; who thereby shewed us, that the greatest abhorrence of sin is perfectly consistent with the greatest kindness and compassion for sinners.

Lastly; I proceed to take notice of the advantages and benefits which redound from the practice of this duty. And most evident they are, both in respect of society, and every individual. It is not perhaps easy to determine whether greater mischief be done to society by the beginners of enmity, or the fomenters of it: but without question it suffers greatly from both; who are answerable between them for the most and the worst evils that infest human life. However, since the state of mankind is such, that many men are, and will be unjust and injurious; it would doubtless be of infinite service to the public, if the precept in the text was generally observed and practised. Innumerable broils, feuds, contentions, animosities, would be hereby either prevented, or soon stopped. Such a habit, such a disposition,

disposition, when rooted in the minds of men, would grow up into a firm bank against the overflowings of ill-will, and the inundations of strife. The wrongs that were done would slide away gently, without spreading, or giving much disturbance to the community; and in a little time be swallowed up and lost in the wide ocean of charity. And as to the private advantages arising from the discharge of this duty, they are manifestly great and unquestionable. For, not to repeat what has been already mentioned, the peace and tranquillity of a man's own mind; benevolence is a natural and never-failing source of the purest pleasure, and most sincere satisfaction. And when it is exercised towards enemies, yields a delight of the highest and most heavenly nature. To conquer a wild affection, and quell a mutinous passion; to maintain, against all opposition, the authority of religion, the empire of reason, and the majesty of truth; affords a wise man more solid joys, and more durable triumphs, than all the world about him can equal. Though injuries may strike him, or even wound him; yet these wounds never fester, or corrupt, as in
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the case of an ill habit; but are easily and instantly healed by the balsamic virtue of his own mind. And moreover, they seldom either bring much smart with them, or leave a visible scar behind them. To which must be added, that the greatest malevolence, cruelty, and rage, are hereby soonest softened, if not subdued; as by a contrary disposition they are increased and inflamed. The hardest hearts may relent, and be won, by patience, gentleness, and good-will; and the greatest enmity be converted into friendship. This virtue not only lessens the number of enemies, but changes the very nature of them: not only disarms, but civilizes: not only mollifies their rugged dispositions, but melts them into kindness and compassion. In short, it directly tends to universal peace and good-will among men; and were it duly practised, would give a truer idea of the happiness of heaven, than ever the world was yet blessed with; and contribute more than any thing else to render us, as far as human infirmity will permit, "perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect."

S E R M O N VI.

THE EXCELLENCE OF OUR
SAVIOUR'S DOCTRINE.

JOHN VII. 46.

Never man spake like this man.

THESE words were spoken of our blessed Saviour by certain officers, who had been sent by the Pharisees and chief priests of the Jews to apprehend him; but who, upon conversing with our Lord, and hearing some part of his doctrine, not only desisted from all attempt against him, but returned to their masters

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with this extraordinary character and commendation of him, that “never man spake like him:” that they had never before heard any one deliver such wise and excellent instructions, so rational and pure a doctrine, and so apt to convince and affect the mind, as this person, whom they supposed to be an impostor, had just now delivered to them.

It is not my intention to consider particularly what that discourse of our Saviour was, which made so great an impression on the minds of these officers; but what I propose, is to take occasion from hence to speak somewhat in general concerning the excellency of that doctrine which our blessed Lord delivered to the world; to shew how truly it deserves the approbation of men, and upon what accounts it is to be preferred to the teaching of any, who appeared in the character either of philosophers, or prophets, or institutors of religion before him.

For evincing the excellency of our Saviour’s doctrine, I shall first consider what the great design proposed by it is, and then shew that this most worthy and excellent design has been prosecuted by our Lord by methods the most proper and effectual,

al, and such as give his institution a great advantage above the schemes and institutions of philosophers, and all the other teachers and instructors of mankind.

Whoever looks into the Gospel, will easily perceive that the great end proposed by the Author of it, is the reformation of men, and the improving them in all virtue. Our Lord himself declares, that "he came to call sinners to repentance;" to correct every thing that is amiss in the tempers and manners of men, and to engage them to an universal purity both in heart and life. In another place, he says that "he came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them;" that he did not intend in the religion which he was about to institute, to dissolve any of the natural and moral obligations which were laid upon men before his appearance; but that, on the contrary, he designed to confirm and reinforce these obligations, to perfect the design of "the law and the prophets," by inculcating the doctrines of piety and virtue, and urging the practice of them in the most effectual manner upon mankind. The Apostles have given us the same notion of the design of the Christian

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institution,

institution, with that which was delivered by our Saviour himself. Thus St. Paul informs us, that "the grace of God that bringeth salvation," by which he means the salutary doctrine of the Gospel, "hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." St. John declares, that "the purpose of the Son of God's manifestation in the flesh," of his doctrine and life in this world, was "that he might destroy the works of the devil;" that he might remove from among men all idolatry, corruption, and vice; and that in the room thereof, he might plant all virtue and goodness among them. And the Apostle Peter tells us, that "God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless us in turning away every one of us from our iniquities." These are such clear and full declarations, as leave no room to doubt of the true intention of Christianity. Every one that impartially considers them, must be satisfied that our Saviour designed by means of his religion to purify and reform our nature, and to make

make mankind sincerely and universally holy and virtuous.

Now this noble end our Saviour prosecuted by the wisest and best means that have ever been proposed for effecting it; and such as, if well improved, will most certainly and easily bring it to pass. For making this appear, let us consider; first,

That the fundamental principles of piety and goodness, which the light of nature most clearly taught, which the Philosophers inculcated, and which Moses and the Prophets delivered in their writings, concerning the difference between moral good and evil; the nature of virtue and vice, and their respective tendencies; the being and attributes of God; his providence, and government of mankind: that all these are repeated and published again in the revelation of the Gospel, free from every mixture of error and superstition, and placed in such a light as will be most apt to give them their full force and influence upon the mind. And this is certainly a circumstance of considerable moment: for although the evidence of these great articles is so very strong and obvious, that not only men of reflection among the heathens, but
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the greatest part of mankind have always had some belief and sense of them; yet it is certain that they were held by the generality of them, not in their genuine simplicity, but obscured and depraved by many errors and follies, which were more especially blended with their notions and reasonings about the Divine nature and perfections, concerning which they became "vain in their imaginations," and received such monstrous opinions as were the foundation of the grossest idolatry, superstition, and immorality. And with regard even to the Jews, I think, it may be affirmed, that whatever improved notions, beyond what commonly prevailed among the heathens, were delivered to them concerning the Supreme Being, they were not yet so clear and full as to hinder their running very easily into narrow and partial conceptions of him, as if his goodness was confined to their nation, and they were the only people in the world that he had any concern for; and as if his presence was limited to their temple, and no services would please him which were not performed there; in consequence of which, they became vain, and proud, and insolent despisers of the rest

rest of mankind; and most groundlessly presumed on the favour of God, even while they were committing the greatest impieties. But now the doctrine of christianity upon these first and most necessary points, is throughout rational and pure, being the sum of all the wisest apprehensions which mankind have ever had concerning them, separated from all their mistakes, and delivered with so much clearness and simplicity, that it must easily approve itself to the mind, and if digested with any care, may be the sure foundation of a worthy and good conduct; particularly, the representation which it gives us of the attributes and perfections of God, his unity and spiritual nature, his almighty power, his infinite wisdom and supreme and universal dominion, his unlimited goodness and impartial justice, his perfect purity and inflexible regard to virtue; the representation, I say, which the gospel gives us of these divine attributes, is such as reason must immediately approve, and allow to be every way worthy of the supreme mind; and cannot fail to raise in all who seriously attend to it, the highest veneration, gratitude, and love, towards this most adora-

rable and excellent being, and effectually restrain them both from idolatry and superstition, keeping them stedfast in the worship of the one true God, and leading them to seek his favour only by innocence and integrity of heart and life.

There are other principles, of vast consequence, for supporting the practice of virtue, which appeared somewhat doubtful to the most considerate persons among the Heathens, and some of them even to the Jews, which are fully ascertained and put beyond all doubt by the revelation of Christianity. Such, for instance, are the great doctrines concerning the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments; which, whatever solid foundation they may have in nature and reason, were never so clear and manifest even to the Philosophers of the greatest name, but that they frequently discovered an uneasiness about the truth of them, and that they wanted some stronger evidence for establishing their minds in the firm persuasion and belief of them; and which were so sparingly delivered in the sacred books of the Law, that the reception which these doctrines met with,

with, which was indeed pretty general among the Jews, especially towards the conclusion of their state, (though there was one numerous sect of them, which always disbelieved them) whencesoever it was derived, could hardly have proceeded from any notices of them that were originally contained in their religion. But now the revelation of the Gospel "hath brought life and immortality to light:" the doctrine of our Saviour hath extricated mankind from all the darkness and perplexity which they were formerly in; with regard to a future life, hath opened and enlarged their prospects beyond the grave, and given such an assurance of another world, in which mankind are to be inconceivably happy or miserable, according to their good or bad conduct here, as may make all who attend to it acquiesce in a full expectation of this other world, and remove from their minds every suspicion of its reality. Such likewise is the doctrine concerning the efficacy of repentance, which, however credible it may be upon principles of reason, and whatever strong hope or persuasion several of the heathens had of the truth of it, seems to have been uncertain in

the judgment even of some thinking men in the pagan world? and much more in the opinion of the vulgar, if we may judge of their notions from their practice of endeavouring to appease the wrath of God, and to procure his favour, not by the exercise of a true repentance, but by offering one sort of sacrifice after another to him, and by many superstitious ridiculous rites which were altogether impertinent and ineffectual for the purpose. But now the efficacy of repentance is one of the clearest principles in the christian institution; the declarations of our Lord and his Apostles are so express and full upon this head, that every one who believes them and knows himself to be a true penitent, must banish all doubts and fears about his being in a state of acceptance with God, and rejoice in the sure hope of the divine forgiveness and favour. After these, I may instance in another important principle of religion, which has received a great confirmation in the institution of our Saviour, which is the doctrine of a divine assistance, accompanying the endeavours of men in virtue. Of this assistance, it is certain that not only the Jews but the Heathens had
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had some notion and expectation; for we find the philosophers frequently hinting at it, and proposing it as a motive and encouragement to virtue: but it can hardly be supposed that any of the heathens ever looked upon it as a thing more than probable, or which the goodness of the Deity and his love of virtue might incline him to grant to men. Whereas the doctrine of our Saviour has made such a plain offer, and given such a positive promise of it, that all who seriously apply themselves to the practice of virtue, may depend that they will be supported in it; that God will go along with them in all their attempts to reform themselves, and make their endeavours successful. Now whoever considers how absolutely necessary the belief of at least some of these principles is for promoting virtue among men, and the great influence which the belief of all of them must have upon the practice of it, that a full and steady persuasion of the truth of them is enough to fortify a man against all possible temptations to desert his duty, and to make him adhere to it in the most difficult circumstances; whoever, I say, considers this, must see that the institution

of our Saviour, by bringing these principles out of the uncertainty in which they formerly lay, and settling them upon a sure foundation, has done a most important service to the cause of virtue, has provided much more effectually for its prevalence, and given it a vastly stronger support and establishment than any institution ever did before.

The religion of our Saviour, moreover, suggests noble and powerful motives for engaging men to virtue, which are peculiar to itself, and which the world were never acquainted with before: I mean those which arise from the infinite love of God, in sending his only-begotten Son into the world, to make a revelation of his will to mankind, to propose and declare the terms of acceptance with him, and to give us all necessary help and encouragement for coming up to these terms; and from the infinite condescension and love of our blessed Saviour, manifested in all that he did, taught, and suffered, for recovering us more effectually from our sinful and miserable condition, and bringing us to a state of everlasting perfection and happiness. Whoever attends to this new and
wonderful

wonderful scene of Divine love and goodness towards mankind, which the Gospel has exhibited to our view, may certainly find force enough in it to fill him with all the sentiments of the strongest gratitude and love towards Almighty God, and our blessed Saviour; for producing in him the most chearful and universal obedience to the divine will; for making him to abound in all the most noble acts of piety, and in all the instances of the most generous and sublime virtue.

The positive institutions and external rites of Christianity contribute much better to the advancement of piety and virtue, than those of any other religion have ever done. Something of this sort seems to be necessary in every religion, both for continuing and propagating the profession of it, and conveying the doctrines and principles of it with a stronger and more lively impression into the minds of men. But the rites and forms of most of the religions which have ever been known in the world, instead of serving the interest of true religion, and promoting what must be the end of it, have either had no relation to this purpose, or been unhappily the means of prejudicing and defeating

feating it. This is notoriously true of a great part, at least, of the religious rites and customs of the Heathens, many of which were altogether foolish and ridiculous, and several of them flagrantly impious and immoral. Nor can it be denied, that the ceremonies and forms of the Jews, though originally very well intended, did always by the multiplicity and great variety of them, too much engross the minds, and engage the attention of that people, and came at last to shut out almost all solid piety and goodness from among them. But now the positive and ritual precepts of Christianity are but few, and require nothing but what is very simple and easy, and are all wisely framed for securing the main end of the Gospel, and have the most direct and plain tendency to promote it. For what can be more proper to keep up in our minds a lively sense of virtue, and to confirm and set us forward in the practice of it, than to enter ourselves into the society of Christians, and take upon us the profession of the Gospel in an open and solemn manner; to meet together at stated times in religious assemblies, for worshipping God by prayer and thanksgiving;

giving; for receiving instructions in the great duties of our religion, and having the principles and motives of it strongly and affectionately inculcated upon us; and for commemorating the death of the great Founder of the Gospel, and the benefits which we obtain by his appearance in the world. These institutions are manifestly calculated for raising pious and good dispositions in the hearts of men; and we cannot attend to them with judgment and true devotion, without perceiving the great benefit and use of them, in subduing our irregular desires and inclinations, in preserving us in a divine temper, and making us more expert and active in every part of our duty.

Lastly; The institution of the Gospel is completed, and perfectly fitted for the purpose of reforming mankind, by its divine sanctions, or the confirmation which it receives from the miracles of our Lord and his Apostles. The religion of our Saviour, in this respect, stands at least upon a level with the institution of Moses, and the doctrines of all the most famous Prophets of the Old Testament, and has a great advantage above the institutions of the antient Heathen legislators and philo-

philosophers, whose doctrines and precepts did indeed by their own light and evidence insinuate themselves into several inquisitive and free minds; but for want of proper methods to propagate them, and a proper authority to enforce them, could never make any progress among the main body of men. Indeed the generality of the world have naturally so much levity and inconstancy of mind, and for the most part labour under so much prejudice and corruption, that it is very difficult to fix their attention even on the most noble and important objects, and to bring them so far as to hearken to a doctrine which is perfectly pure and holy, and much more to make them heartily consent to it and live under its power and influence: so that whoever attempts to instruct and reform them, and would expect any great success from his endeavours, must find, if he can, some more powerful means of engaging their attention, and influencing their minds, than the wisest and justest reasoning which he can use with them, will be. Upon this account it was that the lawgivers among the heathens endeavoured to found their institutions upon the authority

thority of a divine commission, which they knew was a thing that would naturally strike the minds of men, and procure the greatest and most universal reverence to their instructions and orders. Now what they falsely pretended to be, and for the most part so weakly, that none of any tolerable reflection was ignorant of the deceit, our Saviour proved that he really was: he shewed himself to be a divine teacher and lawgiver, by performing, and enabling his Apostles likewise to perform, such mighty works in confirmation of his doctrine and precepts, as carried the plainest marks of the interposition of heaven, and which no man could be supposed to do, "except God was with him." This circumstance must make a great impression on the minds of all men, and give a full conviction, if any thing at all will, even to the most prejudiced and inconsiderate of the truth of his religion, and the obligation of his law, and of the great danger of rejecting and disobeying them; according to that natural and obvious reflection of the Apostle, "How shall we escape if we neglect
" that great salvation, which at the first
" began to be spoken by the Lord, and
" was

“ was confirmed unto us by them that
“ heard him; God also bearing them wit-
“ nefs, with figns and wonders, and with
“ diverfe miracles and gifts of the Holy
“ Ghoft.”

In this manner has our Saviour carried on and perfected the great design of his religion: thus has he laid a fure foundation for our praftifing all virtue, and afforded us incomparably the greateft advantages for this purpofe, that were ever granted to mankind.

If then we would in any meafure answer the obligations which Chriftianity hath laid upon us, and make a proper improvement of the helps which it affords us for the praftice of virtue, we muft not only keep ourfelves innocent and free from every prevailing fin, but endeavour to become remarkable for all good qualities; we muft not content ourfelves with any fmall attainments in virtue, but be always forming ourfelves upon the example of Almighty God, and be in a continual progrefs towards the perfection of goodnefs: we muft confider ourfelves as defigned, according to our Saviour’s fimilitude, to be the “ light of the world;” as perfons who are to diffufe an enliven-
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ing and salutary influence, and set a bright pattern to all around us; who are to adorn religion, and recommend it by our conduct to the approbation and love of mankind. This will be "to walk worthy
" of the vocation wherewith we are called,
" and to have our conversation such as
" becometh the gospel of Christ;" to make our practice bear a conformity to our notions and the principles by which we profess to be governed. And this is the only way in which we can make our profession of christianity turn to any valuable account to us. When our character of christians is no more than a name, it may indeed serve for a mark of distinction, and furnish us with matter of talk and disputation, and perhaps sometimes be useful in promoting some low worldly designs; but except it be accompanied with a suitable behaviour, it will be so far from advancing our spiritual interest, and increasing our future happiness, that with regard to these we must suffer very greatly upon the account of it, according to that most equitable and impartial rule of divine judgment, "to whomsoever much is given, of him much will be required;" in consequence
of

of which we are told, "the servant who
" knows the will of his Lord, and pre-
" pareth not himself, neither doth ac-
" cording to his will, shall be beaten
" with many stripes."

SER.

S E R M O N VII.

ON ANXIETY.

MATTHEW VI. 34.

Take no thought for the morrow.

THIS is part of our Saviour's sermon on the Mount; wherein he proposed a short sum of Christian doctrine, in opposition to the false maxims, and corrupt notions of morality, that then obtained in the world. And indeed, all the precepts he there laid down, though highly reasonable in themselves, were yet
so

so distant from the common opinions and practice of the Jews, that we are not to wonder, if, as St. Matthew informs us, "when he had ended these sayings, the multitude was astonished at his doctrine:" for they had heard nothing like it from their teachers, the Scribes and Pharisees. And, perhaps, no one branch of it was more surprising to that worldly-minded people, immersed deeply in the cares of life, and in a restless concern for earthly things, than the rule given by him in the text: "Take no thought for the morrow."

A rule, which even to Christian ears may seem somewhat harsh at first hearing; and will therefore deserve to be a little explained, in order to its becoming a sure foundation of duty, and the proper subject of those reasonings and exhortations with which I propose to enforce it.

"Take no thought for the morrow."

The meaning of our Saviour in these words, cannot be, that we are to live at random, secure and careless of whatever may befall us; that we are not to look into the consequences of our own, or other men's actions, nor endeavour any ways to foresee, and prevent approaching dangers; that we are to make no manner
of

of provision for future events, to lay up nothing, and concern ourselves about nothing, but what is present, and immediately before us : for this is no part of the character either of a wise or good man, nor agreeable to many other rules and directions given us in Holy Scripture. Doubtless, sagacity in discerning, and a prudent forecast towards declining evils, are not only allowable, but commendable qualities : frugality and diligence are certainly virtues : and therefore the prudent man is thus described by Solomon, that “ he foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself : ” and the ant is recommended to us, as a pattern of providence and parsimony ; “ Go to the ant, “ thou sluggard, consider her ways, and “ be wise.”

Our Saviour's meaning plainly is, to forbid such a care and concern for future accidents, as is attended with uneasiness, distrust, and despondency ; such a degree of thoughtfulness, as takes up, and dejects, and distracts the mind. We are not too curiously to pry into the remote issues of things, nor to perplex and afflict ourselves with the forethought of imagined dangers : we are not to guard
against

against want, by an eager anxious pursuit of wealth, nor be so careful in providing supplies for the necessities of this life, as to forget that we are designed for another. In this sense we are obliged "to take no thought for the morrow." And indeed this is the sense which the original naturally carries: for what our version renders by "taking thought," is in the Greek, a word of much greater force and compass, signifying a restless solicitude, and distraction of thought; and by "the morrow," is not meant the very next day only, but, according to the import of the Eastern phrase, all the time to come, any future event, at what distance soever. The design of the text therefore is, to prohibit all anxious and perplexing cares; whether as to the good things of life, the necessities and first conveniencies of it, how we shall be furnished with them; or, whether as to the ill things, the possible dangers, and distant evils of life, how we shall bear them.

It shall be my present business to shew both the evil, and the unreasonableness of such anxious thoughts; and how little they are to be justified, either in point of piety or prudence.

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The evil of anxiety chiefly consists in this, that it is always built on a secret distrust of God's goodness towards us, and perpetual watchfulness over us. It hath indeed somewhat of the nature of infidelity; and therefore our Saviour applies himself to those who give way to it, under this form of address: "O ye of little faith!" Did we repose an entire confidence in God; were we thoroughly persuaded, that he is as ready, as he is able, to do every thing that is needful for us, and that, without his permission and appointment, no snare can entrap us, no calamity can crush us, no evil can approach to hurt us; had we always upon our minds a deep and lively sense of these truths, it were impossible that a concern for future events should much disquiet us; we should certainly, according to the advice of St. Peter, "cast our care upon God," if we in good earnest believed, that he "cared for us." I do not say, that such a persuasion would render us indifferent to all events, and wholly unconcerned at the probable approach of impending dangers; but it would in a good measure take off the edge and sting of our forebodings; it would compose

and calm us into a patient resignation of ourselves to the Divine will and appointment; it would make us hope the best that there is room to hope in every case, and expect the worst that could happen with tranquillity and evenness.

By the light of nature we learn, God is infinitely wise and good: and what greater security can we have, than to be under the protection of infinite wisdom and goodness? Ought we in reason to disturb ourselves with an eager desire of possessing what infinite goodness shall be pleased to deny us? Do we not know, and feel, that we depend upon God, originally, for what we are, and every moment for his continued preservation? That "in him we live, move, and have our being?" And can we doubt, whether he, who gave us the greater gift, being itself, will afford us the less, whatever is absolutely requisite to our well-being? The argument is our Saviour's: "Take no thought," says he, "for your life, what ye shall eat; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on: is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"

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The same plain lesson we learn also from the observation of God's perpetual care and Providence over the several ranks of lower and less noble creatures; over the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field, and the very plants that flourish on the face of the earth. "These all wait upon him, who giveth them their meat in due season." He feeds them within, and he cloths them without, either usefully, or splendidly, as seemeth best to him: his overflowing bounty supplies them with whatever is suitable to their natures and wants: he openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with good." And shall he, who provides thus liberally for inferior beings, neglect any ways to take care of man, the heir of all his blessings, and Lord of the creation? Thus hath the same divine preacher, with admirable simplicity and force, argued in the same chapter: "Consider the fowls of the air" (says he) "for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them: are ye not much better than they? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do

“ they spin ; and yet I say unto you that
“ Solomon in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if
“ God so clothe the grafs of the field,
“ which to day is, and to morrow is cast
“ into the oven, shall he not much more
“ clothe you, O ye of little faith ?”

But I proceed to observe, That an anxious concern for to-morrow, is as destitute of all pretences to wisdom as goodness.

A censure, that will not easily be allowed ! since the looking forward to the probable events of things hath been ever esteemed one of the first and chiefest instances of prudence. It hath so, and with good reason ; when that sagacity is employed in a proper manner, and within its due bounds ; when it gives the mind a calm and clear foresight of the difficulties it is likely to meet with, and leaves it at liberty, under that view, to prepare itself every way for the encounter : but when it serves only to disarm us of our courage, and to deprive us of our reason ; to create vexations to us, and to multiply dangers ; it is then the very folly of foolishness, as may appear from the ensuing reflections. For, first,

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The task we set ourselves in this case, is infinite and endless: and after all, will not answer the design, for which it is intended. He, who makes the uncertain events of futurity the object of his concern, has taken care to supply his mind with perpetual matter of disquiet; has found a fruitful subject of uneasiness, which can never be exhausted. The possible evils and calamities of life are without number; and in vain therefore should we attempt to reckon them up: or, could we number them, it would be a still vainer attempt, to forecast with ourselves particularly how we might avoid them. Did the affairs of this world proceed in an even and regular course, so that we might easily trace effects from their causes, and judge surely of the future by the present; it might be reasonable and prudent often to employ our thoughts and concern on times and things at a distance, and endeavour to foresee, what were possible to be foreseen, in order to make the wisest use and advantages of it. But alas! we have no sure clue to guide us in such searches as these: the events of life are to the utmost degree uncertain, and depend often on such

secret springs and motions, as lie without the reach of our observation; and therefore fall out often so crossly, and so contrary to common rules, that it is but lost labour to draw long schemes beforehand, and form nice conjectures upon them. "I returned and saw under the sun" (says a very experienced observer) "that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all." There is scarce any man, perhaps, who is not sensible, that the greatest turns that have happened to him in his fortunes, have been owing to such a set of conspiring circumstances, as he could not any ways have foreseen, nor can yet account for: and few there are, I believe, who have not by the same happy co-incidence of things, without their foreknowledge, or care, escaped great dangers. And what therefore is so very uncertain as future events are, ought not to be the object of any great concern or passion. But were it possible to guess at a remote event with some degree of assurance, yet it is impossible to know, whether we ourselves shall live
to

to see it. It may happen, as we presage: but ere it happens, we may be snatched from the world; and that is all one to us, as if it were never to happen at all. And why then should such a short-lived being as man, lengthen his cares to no purpose? Why should a creature of "to-day, take thought for the morrow?"

Either the evil we fear, will come, or it will not: if it will, then the saying of our Lord takes place, sufficient for the day (that is, for the day of visitation) is the evil thereof: it is time enough to bear it, when it doth befall us; but it is unpardonable folly to invite it to come and torment us before our time; to add imaginary to certain afflictions, and to suffer a thing a thousand times over in our thoughts, because we must once suffer it in reality. But if it will not come, then our fear of it is our only evil: and surely such a fear is "vanity and vexation of spirit," in the utmost propriety of the expression. Anxiety of mind, therefore, makes us feel a thousand afflictions, which will never overtake us, and multiplies those which certainly will. And how can a worse character possibly be

given of any thing, that sets up for prudence? Nay,

It not only multiplies evils, but takes away from us the power either to escape, or bear them; renders us incapable of using those methods of prevention, which are requisite to ward off the blow, or of suffering what we cannot prevent, with decency and patience. This is plain, that the worst thing in the world to advise with in case of dangers, present or future, is a scared imagination: for that disturbs and disorders a man's thoughts to such a degree, that he cannot calmly consider what is fittest to be done, in order to avoid the thing he fears; and it deprives him also of that presence and firmness of mind, which should support him under what is unavoidable.

Again, this concern for futurity robs us of all the ease and the advantages, which might arise from a proper and discreet use of the present moment. Certainly, the greatest pleasure, on this side heaven, lies in an even and serene, a calm, composed, and steady mind; which is inwardly at rest, and, by consequence, at leisure to enjoy all outward comforts; which hopes the best, and is prepared for
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the worst ; enjoys the present, and is not anxiously concerned for the future. Such a temper of mind is the greatest blessing God can bestow upon a man, because it gives a relish to all other blessings ; and therefore the greatest folly a man can be guilty of, is, to part with it upon any account, and to quit a certain tranquillity now, out of the vain fear of being robbed of it some time, or other. Further,

It is very unreasonable to disquiet ourselves about distant evils ; it often happening that the presence of the things themselves, suggests better expedients, wiser and quicker counsels to us, than all our wisdom and forethought at a distance can do. “ The morrow ” (says our Lord) “ shall take thought for the things of itself ; ” that is, it shall bring along with it a power and strength of mind answerable to its necessities, a frame of spirit every way suited to our circumstances and occasions. Thus sickness (as one well observes) doth of itself produce in us such a temper, as is fitted to that trial ; it makes us affect privacy and silence, which conduce to our recovery, and gives us such a seriousness, and readiness to submit to

good advice, as is agreeable to the dangers that attend it. And thus necessity and want infuse into the soul that decency of behaviour, that carefulness to watch proper opportunities, that courtesy and eloquence of speech, which no premeditation can furnish, and proves a kind of inspiration. Trouble not thyself, therefore, about what is to come: for when it is to come, it shall either find, or make thee ready to undergo it: "to morrow shall take thought for the things of itself;" and why then shouldst thou be at a needless expence of thought before-hand?

To conclude, let all of us, who are convinced of the reasonableness of these speculations, put them immediately in practice! let us even "to day, while it is called to day," throw off all anxiety and concern for "to morrow!" If we heartily believe the doctrine of Divine Providence, let us shew our faith by our works; let us live, as if we did believe it; industriously indeed, warily, wisely; because by these means we are to entitle ourselves to the protection of God; but withal, unconcernedly, chearfully, resignedly, as knowing, that we are secure of his protection when we stand in need of it. Let
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us behave ourselves like dutiful children, under the guidance of a wise and gracious parent, who, we are satisfied, loves us, and will, as he thinks fit, and sees best, provide for us : let us follow all his commands and directions with an implicit obedience, and trouble ourselves with nothing farther, but only to do the duty which he hath appointed us, in our several places and stations. Let us “ cast all our care upon him, for he careth for us.”

S E R M O N V I I I .

O N E N V Y .

P R O V E R B S X X V I I . 4 .

Who is able to stand before envy?

IT was the deliberate judgment of Solomon, the most diligent and sagacious surveyor of nature that ever was, after he had "seen all the works that are done under the sun," that the whole sum is but "vanity and vexation of spirit;" and that "that which is crooked, cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting, cannot be numbered."

But

But among all the numberless defects and irregularities discoverable in human life, certainly there is none that betrays greater depravity of temper, than that mentioned in the text, Envy; this is what, like “dead flies, causeth the “sweetest ointment to send forth a stinking savour;” and renders even that good the greatest eye-sore, which we might in some measure comfortably enjoy, and freely communicate to one another, were it not, that we are so unreasonably apt to grudge every man his proper share, and so desirous (if it could be) to engross the whole to ourselves. Inasmuch, that “for every right work,” if there be any excellency, or advantage of one above another; whether it be an endowment of nature, an invention of art, an acquisition of industry, or that profit and honour which always should be, and sometimes is the present reward of such laudable attainments; for every one of these, “a man is envied by his neighbour.” A temper, that is every way base, disingenuous, and wicked; the most spiteful opposer of all that is good and worthy, and the most industrious promoter of all manner of evil. And therefore I am persuaded,

suaded, we can none of us bestow our time, or our pains better, than by endeavouring to root it out of our own hearts, and banish it out of all conversation.

Envy is a grief of mind conceived upon the prosperity of another, especially when such his prosperity is no ways detrimental to the envious person himself.

It is directly opposite to that Christian benevolence which interests itself, and all its inclinations, wishes and endeavours, in the good of others: the accession, continuance, or increase of which, it most heartily rejoices at, and finds and feels its own enjoyment therein.

Whereas envy, on the contrary, most malevolently inverts the order both of nature, and of religion: it rejoices with those that weep, and weeps with those that rejoice. To hear of other's misfortunes, and feed the eye with such spectacles, is the very highest gratification of which so depraved a mind is capable: but the news or notice of any one's success, is a grievous mortification.

And this malevolent spirit shews itself in various ways, and upon various occasions.

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Sometimes, it conceives a deadly hatred against those, to whom the world is so just as to allow them their just share of honour, or esteem, or whatever it is, that by point of merit they might claim, or by favour they may happen to obtain.

Such was the spirit that the insolent Haman was possessed with; who, when he came from the royal banquet in the gladness of his heart, and mightily puffed up with the great riches and honours that the King had heaped upon him, was nevertheless so disturbed at the very sight of Mordecai, that he frankly owned, "All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the King's gate." So much bitterness is there in envy, (as appears from this example) that it will not suffer a man to relish the sweetness of what he most delights in; purely for the anguish that he is in, to see others sharers with him, though without any detriment or diminution to himself; unhappy only in this, that he cannot be happy alone.

Sometimes the spirit of envy afflicts itself to behold the happy success, or the deserved preference of those, who have taken pains to qualify themselves for it,
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and are entitled to it; such is the "foul
"of the sluggard, which desireth and
"hath nothing;" but looketh with an
evil eye upon his neighbour's plentiful
field, who was content "to rise up early,
and to sit up late," and therefore deserves
to "eat the bread" which he earns with
so "much carefulness."

Such was the envious spite of the
Medes and Persians against Daniel, when
by reason of the excellent spirit that was
in him, "he was preferred before them
"all, and made the first president in the
"kingdom." They knew they could
not contend with him in knowledge, un-
derstanding, or integrity, and therefore
they ungenerously conspired his downfall.

Such is the nature of envy. I proceed
to shew, that it is among vices one of
the most unreasonable, unjust, impious,
and unchristian. And, first,

It is a vice most unreasonable in itself;
for let the envious man single out what
object he pleases, there is not the least
shadow of a reason to be given, why the
good or prosperity of others, considered
merely as such, should be the cause of
regret, or discontent to him. And yet
this he must say, if he would pretend to
colour

colour his practice with any shew of reason. To try therefore how he can stand the test: will he say that it is reasonable to envy a man for his beauty, or his strength, his genius, or memory, or the like? No he cannot; for these are endowments of mind and body, derived indiscriminately from nature, to some with more, to others with less degrees of perfection. Those who enjoy the largest share of them, did not furnish themselves; nor did they defraud others of their portion, to whom nature has been less bountiful. It is egregious and unpardonable folly therefore, to grieve and repine at such things, as it is in no one's power to help; or to envy a man for that, which it is no real virtue in him to have, nor no just blame in another to want.

It will perhaps be said, however, that possibly there may be reason to envy a man for his acquired intellectual improvements. But this cannot be; for all acquirements of this sort, depend in a great measure upon men's natural abilities, and their opportunities of good education and conversation. They who set out with these happy advantages, and make a right use of them, are in a fair way to excel: but they

they that want them, can hardly pretend to it. But there can be no cause in the mean while, why another man's excellency should breed the canker of envy in me; for either it is an excellency that I may attain to, and then it is matter of emulation, and not of envy; or else it is such as is utterly unattainable, even by my best endeavours, and then it is fruitless folly to torment myself about it, or to strain a weak eye, by enviously looking up towards it.

Shall it then be said, that it may be reasonable at least to envy the wealth, and honour of the rich and fortunate? for these are the things that envy chiefly sends her longing looks after. Alas! no. Worldly success depends upon a luckily concurrence of accidents and events, which the wisest mortal can neither foresee, nor command. "Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south, but God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another," for what wise reasons, he himself best knows.

What remains? Is it reasonable to envy men for their attainments in virtue? Surely no! Is it matter of grief or offence,

fence, to enjoy the light of a good example? Is it matter of grudging, or repining to see others well advanced in that good way, which we ourselves must endeavour to walk in? What room can there be for envy here? "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." And what reason can there be to envy another the enjoyment of a privilege, which we also, if we be not wanting to ourselves, may without difficulty obtain. But the truth is, it is not virtue itself, but the appendages, and present rewards of virtue, that envy looks so keenly upon. However both here, and there, and wheresoever she happens to fix, she is altogether destitute of the least pretence of reason.

Envy is likewise highly unjust; for it is the part of justice "to render to every one their due, love to whom love, honour to whom honour." But envy, far from complying with this equitable rule, acts still in contradiction to itself too, by tacitly acknowledging some kind of worth and excellency in the object it is levelled at, and yet allowing
little

little or no real respect, but endeavouring to depreciate and lessen it all that is possible. Thus if a man be envied for his wealth or greatness, it will perhaps be suggested, that he is not much overstocked with honesty or merit: if for his learning and wisdom, much vigilance will be used to find out his errors, and to expose his blind side: if for the reputation of his virtue, vain glory and popularity will be objected to him: if for his power and authority, suspicions will be raised of the ill arts he used to obtain it, and the ill designs he has in the exercise of it.

Envy is also impious; for he that "envieth his neighbour," does in effect reproach his Maker, and presumptuously finds fault with the works of creation, and the dispensations of Providence. He that conceives any envy, or grudging against his brother, upon account of any distinctions or advantages he enjoys, does in truth murmur and repine against God, the Supreme Disposer of all, without any due reverence for his sovereign power, or any grateful sense of his all-sufficient goodness.

Lastly;

Lastly; Envy is unchristian, whether we measure it by the example, or the precepts of Christ.

If by his example, certainly nothing can be more opposite; for during his abode on earth, he continually "went about doing good;" it was the business and delight of his life. Nay, he spared not his life itself, but voluntarily laid it down, to obtain everlasting happiness and salvation for mankind. And if there were nothing more to oblige us to the contrary, but his blessed example; certainly it would be a gross absurdity and incongruity in Christians, the followers of the meek, the condescending and compassionate, the charitable Jesus, to live in malice and envy, hateful to, and hating one another.

And, if we consult his holy precepts, nothing is more expressly enjoined, nothing made a stricter matter of duty, than mutual love and good-will among Christians. "This is my commandment," says our loving Master, "that ye love one another, as I have loved you."

Christians must be perfectly ignorant what manner of spirit they are of, they must

must forget the sacred obligations of their profession, and forego its blessed privileges, and in effect renounce their Christian name, before they can violently tear themselves one from another, and break out "into debates, envyings, wraths, "strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults."

Let us now proceed to take notice of some of the mischievous effects of this vice on the envious person himself, and with regard to others.

Envy is certainly the most irksome, and self-tormenting passion that is incident to human nature. You may see it visibly sitting upon the countenance in meagre paleness, and louring in the eye with malignant fullness. You may discern plainly, that at once it consumes the flesh, and preys upon the spirits; and that it is, as the wise man justly complaineth, "a rottenness in the bones."

Envy affects a man's outward condition likewise, and renders it generally as uneasy as his mind. For the envious man is a sort of separatist from human society; he is a perfect man-hater indeed, and therefore is himself deservedly hateful to all, both good and bad. As to
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the wicked, even their vices will animate them against so dangerous an adversary, whose business it is to undermine the happiness of others, and, if he could, to engross it all to himself. And as for those that are better minded, they will still abhor his unjustifiable practices, and shun the conversation of one, so altogether, and so industriously mischievous.

But the most fatal effect of all is still behind; and that is, that it makes a man odious in the sight of God, and debars him from the enjoyment of heaven. For it is always reckoned amongst the criminal works of the flesh, of which St. Paul once and again warns the Galatians, "that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." And certainly a sin that makes a man so uneasy in mind and body, so utter a stranger to all virtue and goodness, so hateful to God and man, and so incapable of enjoying this world or a better, is sufficiently hurtful to the person that is infected with it, and instrumental in avenging its own guilt beforehand. But then we are still farther to consider

Those ill effects of envy, which redound to the detriment of others; and these

these are almost infinite. For St. James tells us, "that where envying is, there is confusion, and every evil work."

There is nothing so base or unworthy, so brutish or barbarous, but what the fierceness of envy will urge men to, rather than not wreak their spleen, and accomplish their revenge. The blood of Abel, and of Christ, witness aloud to this. And there is no age nor country but has had experience more than enough of it. But not to insist only upon the most aggravating circumstances of this sin, the envious man is ordinarily very injurious to his neighbour in thought, word and deed.

First, In thought, for the root of this bitterness is in the heart; there lie those slender suspicions, and evil surmises, and uncharitable censures, and all that treasure of malice and ill-will, which dispose a man of such a distorted mind, to think the worst of every man, to turn or wrest every thing to the worst construction, to judge without candour, to condemn without mercy, to make no abatement or allowance for the most pardonable error or infirmity. But,

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Secondly,

Secondly, The envious man is prone to offend grievously in word. For, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." And where there are so many evil thoughts lodged together, they will find or force a vent, in lying and flandering; in whispering and backbiting, and all manner of evil-speaking. For these are weapons that envy wields with a great deal of dexterity, and is always in hopes to do some tolerable execution with, when she has it in her power to be revenged more effectually and completely. And therefore the envious man will not hesitate, if occasion offers, to charge his neighbour wrongfully, with what he was never guilty of; or to publish, and expose his real faults unnecessarily, and to magnify them beyond measure, dressing them up in the most invidious manner, loading them with the most heinous aggravations, and imputing to them all, even the remotest ill consequences, that could be thought of.

Or if open, and bare-faced slander be not so likely to gain audience, sly insinuation and suggestion shall supply its place. The subtle serpent creepeth out of the hedge unobserved, and biteth the harmless

less passenger by the heel. It is whispered into the ears of the easy and credulous, that all is not as it should be, and that more and worse might be said, and perhaps proved too, if a man were so minded. And thus the suspicion is instilled into the mind of the inadvertent hearer, and he is craftily induced to believe even more, and worse than the malicious whisperer would venture to speak out.

Or if this method be not thought so likely to succeed, detraction will be next employed: men's persons will be imperfectly characterized, their good qualities will be concealed, or at best but slightly passed over; whilst their defects and blemishes are held forth in a full light, and canvassed very narrowly: their good actions will be discoloured by a bad name; their sobriety will be termed moroseness, and their cheerfulness, levity; their liberality will be falsely called profuseness, or their thrift, covetousness; their prudence will be censured for craft, or else their honest simplicity for folly. And thus will every thing that is commendable, be abusively miscalled, and thereby disparaged, or perhaps vilified with an

invidious sort of praise, that seems to pay a respect to the virtue and merit of the person spoken of, but is only designed to make way for some spiteful exception, or to gain credit to the malicious accusation that is to follow.

But, Envy cannot satisfy itself with feeding upon the pleasing thoughts, or mere hopes of mischief, or with the faint efforts of a few malicious words: No! it delights in action and enterprise, and will leave nothing unattempted to accomplish its wicked designs, whether by art, or by force, by undermining or supplanting, or any kind of sinister method, though ever so disingenuous or unworthy, unjust or cruel, hazardous or destructive, either to particular persons, or to whole communities.

To preserve us from indulging this hateful and malignant temper, let us above all things endeavour to "put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness; and let us consider one another "to provoke to love, and good works." Let us consider that we are men, and therefore closely linked together by the very ties of nature; let us consider that we are Christians, and therefore more
strictly

strictly united together in the bond of the same union. Let us consider that we are the disciples and followers of the meek and humble Jesus, who was a true lover of us, and as a proof of our reciprocal love to him, requires that we "love our brethren also;" "who went about doing good," his whole life long, and therefore expects from us that we should think no evil, wish no evil, do no evil to one another, but "as we have opportunity, do all the good we can to all men."

Instead of acting upon the fordid principle of self-love and self-interest; we ought to persuade ourselves of this useful truth, that "we are members one of another," both as citizens and christians; that the end of all society, whether civil or spiritual, is to be mutually kind, and beneficial to each other; that every man's true interest consists in prosecuting the main end of society; and that public and private good, are not in reality separable; that he is the man who makes the best provision for himself, who does the most good to others; and that he undermines his own security, and deprives

himself of his best advantages, who sets out upon a different bottom, and grudges that any man should have any share of good fortune but himself.

Instead of over-rating our own worth by a proud conceit of ourselves, let us "be clothed with humility." For he that thinks meanly and modestly of himself, will be ready to allow every one their due, and willingly yield the preference to those that are more worthy: or whether they be so or no, he will not disturb himself, nor embroil the public, upon a fond opinion that his merit has been injuriously neglected.

Instead of putting a high value, and placing abundance of affection upon the good things of this world, such as riches, honour, and power, which envy always sets her eye and heart upon; let us endeavour to judge of them soberly, and to look upon them, as for the most part they prove, even in the using and enjoying, to be but "vanity and vexation of spirit."

Instead of unthankfully murmuring at the promiscuous, and (in the perverse opinion of envy) the unequal distributions of Providence; let us study to possess
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our minds with an awful, and a grateful sense of God's great wisdom, and of the riches of his goodness. So shall we be induced, without enviously comparing our own condition with that of others, cheerfully to resign ourselves to his disposal, and to take our lot contentedly, as being perfectly satisfied of this, that he knows best what is most convenient for every one of us: so shall we be induced in all humility to acknowledge that we are less than the least of God's mercies; and that his bounty is abundantly larger, even where it is most sparingly bestowed, than the best of our deserts. So might we be persuaded to reduce that good rule of the Apostle into practice; and to "look not every man on his own things," priding himself in what he has received, or pining for what he has not; "but every man also on the things of others:" not with an evil eye, as grudging that Providence should be more liberal to others than himself; but with an ingenuous and thankful heart, glorifying that God who has given so many excellent gifts unto men, and highly esteeming those men who take care to employ and improve their talents, according to the

good pleasure of the Giver, and to his praise and honour.

Finally; To procure a blessing upon all other means, and to render them thoroughly effectual; let this be our earnest, and fervent, and constant prayer: "From envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, good Lord deliver us." Amen.

S E R M O N IX.

THE FOLLY OF IMITATING POPULAR
AND FASHIONABLE VICES.

EXODUS XXIII. 2.

*Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do
evil.*

THE infinite Creator hath planted,
in all mankind, a strong inclinati-
on to society. He hath also endued them
with social principles, with affections of
benevolence and compassion, to sweeten

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and

and improve human life, and excite to a constant intercourse of good offices. And for this we are highly indebted to the wise Contriver and Author of the human frame; thus far all is beautiful, and calculated to serve most valuable purposes. But the unhappiness lies here, that the natural inclination to society is too commonly perverted and abused. It begets, first, a general similitude of manners and opinions, and, by degrees, a conformity to vicious customs and manners: and thus it becomes the instrument of degrading and corrupting our nature, which it was designed to elevate and refine. As this is an error of so fatal a tendency, there is good reason for the particular caution in the text, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil."

The force of custom is, exceedingly great, and unaccountable. The bulk of mankind are quite enslaved by it. They have little else to plead for most of their opinions, and the usages by which nations are distinguished from each other. They imbibe the sentiments which it recommends, with an implicit awe and veneration. Much more regard is paid to it than to the dictates of right reason, which
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are but little known; and where they might be better understood, are seldom consulted. The most ridiculous notions and practices, that can plead antient prescription, and public countenance, have frequently a respect paid to them, and are treated with tenderness, even by persons of higher character and discernment; but they are almost idolized by the vulgar, and propagated with surprising zeal and vehemence. Nay it is custom, that has framed and established, in a great measure, the several religions in the world. It is no wonder then, since men appear to be so indolent, and inclined to submit to and follow the public leading implicitly, that custom is apprehended to give a sort of sanction to vice itself; and hinders them from discerning, in a clear and strong light, its native baseness and deformity.

We may add to this, that even flagrant corruptions and instances of licentious behaviour, when they are general, of consequence grow more familiar, and do not raise so sensible a disgust and aversion, as they would do if they were more unusual; unless the mind be habitually and powerfully impressed by sentiments

of virtue and religion. Our sense of things in the moral world, is very much the same, as it is with respect to the natural. If prodigies, and irregular appearances in nature, were more common, we should converse with them with much less astonishment and reluctance. So likewise examples of wickedness strike with less horror when they are abounding, and appear in every station of life, than they would do in an innocent and regular age, in which they were rare and unfrequent. Nay, in such a state of corruption as this, men who are inclined to the same kind of irregular practices, will easily persuade themselves, that what is so universal, cannot be in any high degree criminal; that the approbation and choice of the majority is a strong presumption in its favour; a presumption at least, that there is more of prejudice than argument against it; and that the restraints laid on the passions, and the notions so rigidly inculcated concerning the difference between good and evil, were invented by the subtilty and craft of politicians and priests, and are supported by enthusiasm. And when persons are gone thus far, the transition is natural

ral and direct to all manner of licentiousness and vice.

But, the danger of these snares, and the inexcusable folly of thus imitating the sinful customs of the age in which we live, will be farther apparent if we consider, first,

That the very foundation, which such mean-spirited sinners set out upon, is extremely wrong; the opinion of the multitude, which is one of the most erroneous, inconsistent, and variable rules we can possibly proceed by. Upon this foundation, it was hardly ever known, that a rational superstructure could be framed either in speculation or practice, either in religion or civil life. For of the generality of mankind it may be truly said, that confused and unconnected notions picked up by chance, and rivetted in them by prepossession and a resolute inattention to a better evidence, are in general, and besides mere animal perceptions, the sum of their knowledge; and that these blind prejudices, with a mixture of strong passions, are the governing principles of their actions.

I will not dispute, but they are endued by the great Creator with natural capacities,

cities, fitted for acquiring more solid and extensive knowledge; and, perhaps, in some instances, for making equal improvements, if they had a suitable education and proper advantages, with many who are now distinguished (because they go in a track wherein they are but seldom followed) for superior abilities. But what appears to be the real state of things in our own times; or, as far as we have the light of history to direct us, in all former ages? The matter of fact is undeniable, that the multitude have ever been persons of very scanty and superficial reflection, indebted almost entirely to nature or instruction, for the little knowledge they have had of religion and morality; of which they would scarce have retained any idea at all, if the principles of both had not been originally impressed upon their minds, and afterwards revived by an extraordinary revelation. And what the light of revelation has restored, in those nations which are favoured with it, instead of increasing, they have rather obliterated and extinguished by their indolence and sensuality. If therefore we set up the general opinion as the measure of truth, or the general
prac-

practice as the standard of right, we are likely to lose both our knowledge and our morality, and to have little else in the place of them but ignorance and superstition. And it has held true in almost every age, that none ever reasoned justly, who did not depart from the sentiments of the vulgar in many things, and oppose their prejudices; nor acted a wise and honourable part, becoming the dignity of their nature, and the obligations of virtue and rational religion, so far as they were led by the predominant taste and bias of the times: nay farther, one of the surest ways that could be taken both to think and act wrong has been, implicitly to follow their guidance, the extravagance of their principles, and the licentiousness of their behaviour. And how indeed can it be expected to be otherwise at any time, if we resign ourselves to the direction of those who seldom think; and whose opinions are so accidental, unfixed, and mutable, that it is impossible to reduce them to a consistent scheme.

But perhaps it will be said by such as are involved in public vices, and follow the loose manners of the age, that indeed they look upon the bulk of mankind

kind as hardly capable of judging for themselves, and consequently, as very unfit to frame opinions and prescribe rules for others, and therefore think it a disgrace to them to have it imagined, that they submit to their judgment, or regard their example. No, the persons whom they allow to lead are such only, as are of distinguished characters; who, by virtue of their high rank and liberal education, must have acquired extensive views, and a more refined sense of things, and are therefore the best judges of true worth, elegance and decency of behaviour, and best able to determine and regulate the public conduct. But how does it appear, that even these are qualified to be our guides, to whose decision we may honourably submit, and safely follow the customs which they introduce? Besides the variety and inconsistency of their principles and pursuits, not only in different ages and in parts of the world far remote from each other, but in the same age and country; besides this, I say, which evidently demonstrates, that their sentiments and manners are no fit rule to govern ourselves by, any more than those of the mere vulgar; besides that this same variety and
incon-

inconsistency proves that they are erroneous guides, since it is impossible for truth to contradict itself: what ground have we to imagine, that these are the persons most likely to find out truth, and to judge with the greatest exactness and impartiality concerning the principles of virtue and religion: educated, as it may fairly be presumed they often are, without that strict discipline, which is necessary to teach the true government of the passions, surrounded with pomp and luxury, and engaged in a continual round of vanity and pleasure, which dazzle the understanding, and divert the attention from subjects of higher importance? where thoughtlessness and levity of temper very much abound, where the spirits are gay, and the appetites inflamed; where frequent incentives to excess present themselves, the examples of it are numerous, and the restraints from it few and inconsiderable; it may with the utmost modesty and decency be affirmed, that we have very little ground to expect either much justness of sentiment about the right conduct of life, or such a rational and well-ordered behaviour, as deserves our imitation.

I shall

I shall add but one thing more to shew the great absurdity of copying after the example of the multitude, whether in high or low stations; and that is, that while their practice is on the side of vice, their judgment and sober reflections are commonly in favour of virtue. This proves, indeed, not only that they are unsafe guides, but such as no man can follow; because he cannot imitate, without, at the same time, opposing them. And which shall we be swayed and influenced by, their reason, or the licentiousness of their behaviour? If by their reason, we can pay no regard to their example; and if we follow their evil example against reason, we must condemn ourselves.

Were we to suppose however, that the multitude are not only more capable of judging truly, but more likely to be actually in the right, than experience teaches us they are; the folly of joining in their evil practices would still continue to be as great as ever; because the most prevailing, nay, the universal opinion of mankind cannot set aside the immutable difference of good and evil. The infamy therefore of a course of vice in each particular instance, must

must be exactly the same in itself and to the view of reason, be it ever so common, as it would be if there was but one single example of it: though as there are many objects to divide our attention, it may not appear publickly in so strong and glaring a light. Nor can the evil consequences of vice be, upon the whole, diminished, by its being widely diffused and communicated. For it is self-evident, that the natural ill effects, which spring directly from it as a tree from its root, cannot be prevented without altering the established constitution and scheme of things. And there can be no reason to suppose, that the righteous judge of mankind will shew the least favour to prevailing and general wickedness, because of the multitude of sinners that are to be punished: since nothing can be more absurd than to imagine, that the very number of the offenders, which calls most loudly for the interposition of justice to give an effectual check to the insolence and triumphs of vice, should be the ground of their impunity; to the entire subversion of all order in the moral world, and laying in mens way an irresistible temptation, for their own security, to seduce and debauch each other.

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But I believe, after all, that the true motive which induces so many to share in popular and fashionable vices is not, that they have a real esteem of the generality in either of the characters above-mentioned, or any reverence for their opinions and customs; but chiefly that they may avoid their censures. They frequently express the utmost contempt of the multitude, while they imitate their extravagancies; but the fear of reproach, and a view to private interest, over-ruling the judgment of their minds, and being too strong for their sense of generosity, prevail with them to follow the manners of those whom they despise. But what is the shame of unpoliteness, which is only imaginary, compared with the foul dishonour of having debased our rational faculties, and eclipsed their native excellence? What are the reproaches of the inconsiderate, ill-judging, giddy multitude, or the scoffs and derisions of sinners of any rank who are lost to virtue and ingenuity of mind, to the sharp rebukes of an awakened conscience causing confusion and tumult within us; to the displeasure of Almighty God, whose awful judgment will absolutely determine our happiness

happiness or misery; and to the contempt of all the rational and sober beings in the universe? Or what are the little precarious advantages, that may arise from vicious compliances, that they should be thought sufficient to compensate for the loss of immortal happiness, and the future terrors and miseries of guilt? A man may easily bear up under undeserved infamy, who has reason to be satisfied with himself, and approves of his conduct as worthy and honourable; but if he is vile and despicable in his own eyes, worldly glory will lose its lustre, and the applauses of his wicked associates must be harsh and ungrateful. Again, when he is sure of the favour of the maker and governor of the world, he may support himself by the prospect of an ample reward hereafter, under all the temporary inconveniences to which he may be exposed by his integrity. But if in the most flourishing circumstances his mind be restless and full of anxiety, tortured by remorse on the account of past irregularities, and by dismal apprehensions of future vengeance, he is then truly and substantially miserable; and can have nothing to afford him any relief but this
poor

poor comfortless reflection, that he was not singular in his vices; and, therefore, as he had sharers in his guilt, he shall also have companions in his punishment.

There is one thing more, which exceedingly aggravates the crime mentioned in the text; and that is, that it is not only the height of folly, but the grossest impiety. For no more heinous affront and indignity can be offered to the great God, than to subject his eternal and immutable laws of righteousness to the wanton caprice, and extravagant conduct of mankind. Thus to treat his sovereign power, and the wisdom and justice of his government, with ignominy; and the rules of virtue as of arbitrary institution, enjoined indeed by the supreme Majesty of Heaven, but only to be observed when they suit with human follies, and do not oppose the prejudices and customs of a degenerate world; this is a crime so complicated, and absolutely inexcusable, as justly demands the severest tokens of the Divine displeasure.

After what hath been said, a few words may suffice to shew the obligations we are under to be singularly and inflexibly virtuous,

tuous, in times of general corruption and depravity; together with the peculiar honour and excellency of such a character.

It shews a nobleness and greatness of spirit, to be true to the dictates of reason, constant and steady to its wise and good resolutions, and to support itself in maintaining the cause of God, the dignity of human nature, and the interest of all intelligent beings, amidst the greatest discouragements and difficulties; despising groundless reproaches, and the virulence of malignant tongues, and with calmness and serenity discharging its duty in the midst of clamour and opposition. A man of so generous a temper, whom neither frowns, nor flatteries, nor private interest can incline to mean condescensions, is not capable of the baseness of either sacrificing his friends, or betraying his country: he is, in short, a character of inestimable value in society. Whereas, it is a certain sign of an abject slavish spirit capable of any villainy, and which ought to be used with no degree of confidence where it is possible that an advantage may be made by abusing it; when a man, for fear of the reproaches of those
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who are declared enemies to virtue, and the shame of their species, consents to bring upon himself guilt and real infamy in this world, and eternal ruin in the next.

Thus it appears, that as a singular virtue must of necessity struggle with very great and unusual difficulties, it is upon that account the more meritorious and honourable. It is this that raises the dignity and grandeur of a character, and advances good men into heroes. For as the performing great actions, above the ordinary trials of human courage, constitutes heroic valour; so the standing it out against a series of difficulties, and being unmoved by revilings and persecutions, as it shews an invincible resolution and strength of mind, is heroic virtue.

Again; Examples of a strict and inflexible goodness are in an especial manner necessary, in a degenerate age, to check the torrent of vice, which otherwise may spread itself wider, and bear down all before it: they may be a means of restoring the moral world to its primitive order and rectitude, and are both the ornament and support of society. Our Saviour therefore in the same discourse, in
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he calls his disciples "the light of the world," gives them this title likewise, "the salt of the earth;" to denote to us, that they were appointed, by exemplary piety, joined with the influence and efficacy of their doctrine, to preserve mankind from corruption.

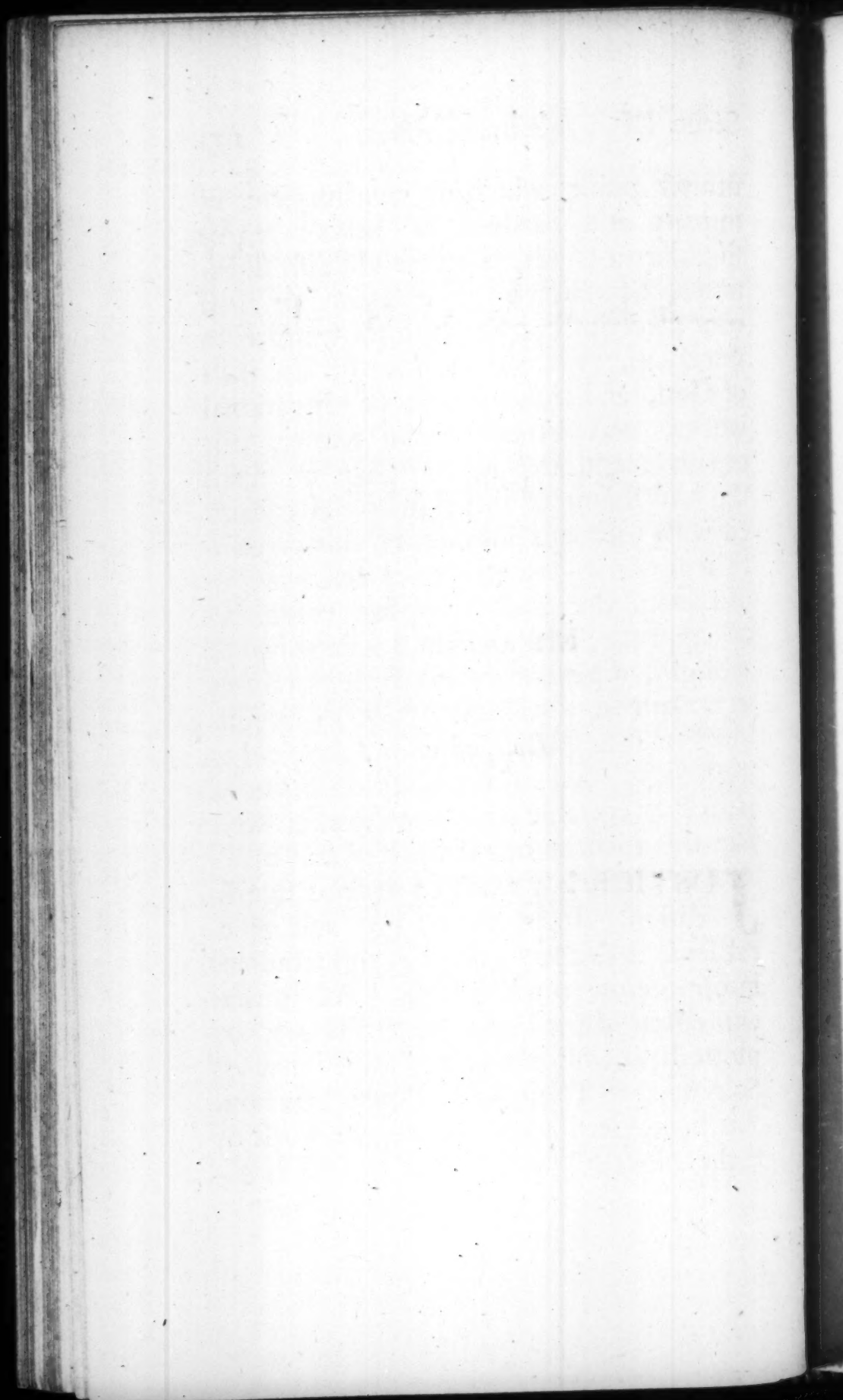
That we may attain this excellence and usefulness of character, and escape the guilt and shame of "following a multitude to do evil;" let us beware of an excessive affectation of popularity, which has a natural tendency to enslave us to prevailing opinions and customs. To seek the just esteem of our fellow-creatures in all lawful ways, and, particularly, by a condescending, gentle, obliging deportment, is doubtless very commendable; because it will render us more easy and comfortable in society, and enlarge our influence and usefulness. But if we anxiously pursue this as an ultimate point on which our main happiness depends, we stand as it were on the edge of a precipice, and are in imminent danger of sacrificing our integrity out of a servile complaisance to the humours of the multitude. Nay I very much question, whether it be even possible for any man to

VOL. VII. I practise

practise all the necessary arts of popularity with perfect exactness, and yet preserve his innocence. But surely it cannot be worth our while, for such a trifle, to forfeit this inestimable treasure, which is our chief honour and security. For the esteem of the multitude generally springs from base and mercenary views; it is not the effect of judgment, but of passion and interest; their favour and prejudice are alike variable; and if we look above the vulgar, men of high degree are vanity, as men of low degree are a lie: should we therefore depend on either as the spring of our happiness, we may, by means of innumerable accidents, besides fickleness and mutability of temper, be disappointed in all our expectations. But if, instead of courting with too much earnestness and assiduity fame and applause from men, we are principally solicitous to secure that honour which cometh from God only, our prospects are built on a sure and immoveable foundation.

To conclude; Let us learn to distinguish rightly between a just and laudable, and an improper and criminal singularity. And what follows is the true state of the case. To be singular in vice is the
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utmost point, which we can imagine, of impiety and hardness of heart: to be singular in trifles, is either childish affectation, or oddness of humour, or stiff conceited obstinacy: but to venture to stand up, as it were alone, for the laws of God, and the rectitude of his rational works, and rescue human nature, our country, and the age we live in, from the foul shame of being universally stained with vice and dishonour; this certainly argues the greatest purity and strength of reason, the most complete command of appetite and passion, sedateness of thought, a generosity above temptations to meanness, a resolution not to be subdued or intimidated, and, in short, every ingredient that is necessary to form a perfectly amiable and worthy character. Let this then be our deliberate and unalterable choice.



S E R M O N X.

O N J U S T I C E.

MICAH VI. 8.

Do justly.

JUSTICE is a word of various signification. In its more large and general sense it denotes universal righteousness in opposition to wickedness. As in that expression of the Psalmist, "The wicked plotteth against the just:" and that of Solomon, "There be just men to whom "it happeneth according to the work of "the wicked."

Sometimes it signifies right or reasonable, in opposition to false or fallacious. As when we say, that is a just conclusion; we mean it is a right or reasonable inference from the premises.

But Justice as a social virtue properly signifies, rendering to every one their due: and is commonly divided into three branches; distributive, penal, and commutative justice.

By distributive justice is meant, bestowing those rewards or honours on others which they deserve. This is an express precept of christianity: "Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." The former part of this precept our Saviour hath particularly exemplified in his practice: for when he was called upon by the public collectors to pay the tribute money, he wrought a miracle to satisfy their demands. But we are not only to "pay tribute to whom tribute is due, but honour to whom honour." This is, we should consider it as a matter of common justice, to pay to all our superiors that respect and deference,

ference, which is due to the station they fill, or the character they bear in life.

Penal justice consists in legally executing the sentence, or inflicting the punishment upon delinquents and malefactors which the law, against which they have offended, directs. There is doubtless a beauty and fitness in the exact distributions of penal justice: but a much greater in the mitigation of them, when any alleviating circumstances will admit the interpositions of mercy. And therefore in the most perfect mind, mercy hath always the preference to judgment, and the precedence of justice. It is the attribute which of all others God takes most delight to display and magnify. Mercy and judgment are both his works: but “mercy is his delight; and judgment his “strange work. And mercy rejoiceth “against judgment:” or is pleased when it is permitted to triumph over it.

But this work of justice is not confined to the civil magistrate: but belongs to every one that is invested with authority and command: and should be exercised in giving such reproofs, pronouncing such censures, and inflicting such penalties, as the crimes of those who

are placed under them deserve. In which the rule of justice is, that the punishment be exactly proportioned to the nature of the offence : and the rule of equity, that it be rather less than greater ; or that it incline to the merciful side : as the laws of all the best constituted states do.

Commutative justice consists in doing that which is punctually honest, right, and equal, in all affairs of traffick or commerce : in which case, perhaps, more frequent and flagrant acts of injustice are to be found than in any other : and especially among those with whom the love of money is the prevailing passion. Commutative justice is violated two ways ; by exaction and fraud. By exaction, when the seller takes advantage from the necessity of the buyer to extort an exorbitant profit. And by fraud, when, through the ignorance of the purchaser, he takes more for what he sells than he knows it is worth. Both these instances are a palpable violation of that universal rule of equity, which in all cases our Saviour hath given us to conduct ourselves by, of “ doing to others, that which we would they should do to us.” And in all matters of commutation of property,
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if every one would faithfully adhere to this excellent rule, there would be no need of any other court of conscience or chancery, than what they would find in their own breasts.

These are the three grand branches of justice, (as it signifies rendering to every one their due) in the regular exercise whereof the christian character so illustriously shines; and upon which, the harmony, good order, and happiness of every society fundamentally depend.

Let us now attend to the several instances of relative justice: or the duties and obligations that result from the various relations mankind bear to one another; all which are to be considered as branches of justice.

But as that universal rule of equity, which our Saviour hath given us to conduct ourselves by in all cases; that “we should do to others, that which we would they should do to us;” is here of indispensable importance and obligation; it may be proper, before I proceed to consider the several branches of relative justice, briefly to explain that rule: which will direct us to the right application of it in the following instances: which is

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the more necessary, because it hath sometimes been mistaken, and upon certain occasions misapplied.

It is said that Alexander Severus, the Roman Emperor, had conceived so high an idea of our Saviour's justice and wisdom, from this single precept which he gave his disciples, that he was about to erect a temple to his honour.

But as the best and plainest rules may be misunderstood and misapplied, so it hath fared with this. Let it be remembered, then, that the meaning of this rule is, not that we should always do to others that which we might possibly wish they would do to us, were we in their case, and they in ours. For this absolute and unlimited construction of the rule, instead of regulating, would pervert the exercise of all justice. The judge, were he in the criminal's case, would doubtless wish the sentence might not be pronounced against him according to law. But it does not follow from hence that therefore he ought not to pass the sentence upon the convicted criminal which the law directs. The offending child wishes that he may not be corrected by his parent; and the parent, were he in
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the child's case, would wish so too: but he is not therefore to with-hold the fit and seasonable discipline when it is wanting. But the true meaning of this golden rule is, that we should always do that to others which, were we in their circumstances, and they in ours, we should judge most fit, and right, and reasonable that they should do to us. And what is fit, and right, and reasonable in the case, we shall be better able to determine by supposing such a change of circumstances. Because in that point of view, what is just and equitable, commonly appears more obvious, than it does when beheld from the situation we are actually in. For instance; Were a superior to place himself in the room of an inferior, he would see it reasonable perhaps to carry it with more condescension, affability, and courtesy towards those below him: and were an inferior to put himself in the place of a superior, he would expect, and would see it reasonable to expect, more deference, duty and respect than perhaps he is now disposed to pay to those above him. And thus would both more readily see, and be more disposed

to rectify the faults in their respective characters and conduct.

Our Saviour's rule, thus explained and thus applied, would be of the most excellent and extensive service. And thus explained, let us now proceed to apply it for the regulation of our temper and the direction of our practice, in the several instances of relative justice.

From the various relations that subsist among men arise certain duties, which in point of justice we owe them; which are founded in the very nature of those relations themselves; and which if we refuse to perform, we violate that great rule of justice I have just been explaining.

Now the most important relations in life, are those that subsist between the prince and his subjects, husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants, friend and friend; and in general, between superiors and inferiors. I shall briefly touch on the several moral obligations that result from each of these relations.

The most important and extensive relation in society, is that which subsists between a sovereign and his subjects: which
contains

contains in it many mutual obligations of justice. Princes are appointed by God to be "his ministers to us for good: to be a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well." The duty of a prince then is to preserve the peace of the community; to protect his subjects in their natural, civil and religious rights, against all their enemies, whether domestic or foreign, that shall attempt to disturb or invade them; to support the authority of the laws, by a steady execution of their sanctions, in punishing the guilty, and dispensing suitable rewards to those who have deserved well of the public: and, in short, by doing every thing he can, that tends to promote the common happiness of the people over whom the great sovereign of the universe hath set him. All this in point of justice he owes his subjects, in consideration of that dignity, wealth and power, with which they invest him.

On the other side, the duties which subjects owe to their sovereign, are honour, esteem and reverence; a peaceful and ready submission to their authority; a strict and faithful obedience to their laws, so far as they are consistent with
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the laws of God: and, instead of censuring the measures of government, (of which they are generally but very incompetent judges) or “despising dominion, “and speaking evil of dignities, and reviling the rulers of the people;” (which men of a petulant tongue, and a factious spirit, are too apt to do) it is their duty to pray for them; that it may please God to bestow upon them wisdom and strength, in proportion to the difficulty and weight of government; for their own comfort and the welfare of the public. This the Apostle expressly enjoins: “I exhort therefore,” says he, “first of all, that “supplications, prayers, intercessions and “giving of thanks be made for all men: “for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may live a quiet and “peaceable life in all godliness and honesty; for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.”

The next relation I shall mention, is that which subsists between husband and wife. “Husbands are to love their wives; “giving honour to them;” to be tender, kind, and indulgent to them, with all prudence and discretion; to be diligent in their proper callings to procure a maintenance
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for their families; cautious of giving unnecessary offence by unreasonable resentments, or an ill-timed exertion of their authority; and to preserve their conjugal fidelity, not only inviolable but unsuspected. And the wife is to make suitable returns of love, esteem, faithfulness and obedience. These are the obligations of nature and religion, and are equally enforced by reason and revelation.

There are other obligations of justice peculiar to the relation of parents and children. "Children are to obey their parents in all things." That is, in all things lawful, so long as they are children, and the parental authority lasts. For when that ceases, (as it will of course in time) this implicit obedience on the child's part ceases with it. But then in the room of it, succeed other filial duties of no less obligation; to bear with the infirmities, ease the burdens, relieve the necessities, supply the wants, and do all they can to help and comfort their aged or enfeebled parents. Common gratitude requires this, if they have been wise, kind, and indulgent parents: if not, even nature and humanity demand it. Children are likewise to honour their parents. This is required in the first commandment

ment of the second table: which, the Apostle observes, "is the first commandment with promise:" to honour them by a decent behaviour towards them, speaking respectfully to them and of them, palliating their infirmities, and making the best of any thing that may be turned to their discredit.

And the duty of parents to children (while the latter remain such) is, to take care of them, to provide all things needful for them, to give them the best instructions, to set them the best examples; and, in a word, to do every thing that is in their power to promote their comfort, credit, and usefulness in this world, and their happiness for ever.

What are the duties of masters and servants? The whole duty of masters the Apostle comprehends in these words; "masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal: knowing that ye also have a master in heaven." By which is not only meant that they faithfully perform the terms of contract, but do every thing else that is right and reasonable, and becoming the character of a wise, discreet and gentle master. To which a more powerful motive cannot be

be urged, than that which the Apostle here suggests; that they have both one common Master in heaven, with whom "there is no respect of persons."

And the duty of servants towards their masters is, to be honest, diligent, and sober; "shewing all good fidelity; not as "eye-servants, or men-pleasers," but out of conscience towards God; by a meek submissive behaviour, a ready and punctual obedience to their commands, and by consulting their master's interest as their own.

There is another class of relative duties that arise out of the friendships we contract in life: which are no less sacred to justice than any I have yet mentioned. These duties of friendship are the same on both sides, and necessary to its very existence. Such as mutual affection, esteem, freedom, fidelity, assistance, admonition, candor, and constancy. These are at once the basis and bonds of all true friendship; without which it cannot long subsist: but thus established, and thus compacted, it must be permanent; and productive of the most solid satisfactions that can be enjoyed in a state of imperfection.

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Lastly ; I shall mention but one thing more, and that is, the relation that subsists between superiors and inferiors in general. The former owe to the latter, condescension, courtesy, benevolence, affability, meekness, charity, and ready assistance and advice, whenever it is wanted or desired : which the latter is bound to repay with all proper respect, gratitude, duty and deference ; in proportion to the relation or degree of subordination, wherein he stands to those whom Providence hath ranked above him.

To conclude ; We hence see how much more injustice and iniquity there is in the world (and perhaps in ourselves too) than we may have hitherto imagined. Whatever transgresses our Saviour's golden rule, is unjust : and whatever violates our relative obligations, is a transgression of that rule.

Let us then resolve, for the honour of Christ and our christian character, to pay a more religious regard to every branch of relative duty than we hitherto have done. Since they come all recommended, not only from the reason and fitness of things, but from the authority of a divine revelation, their obligation is indispensable ;
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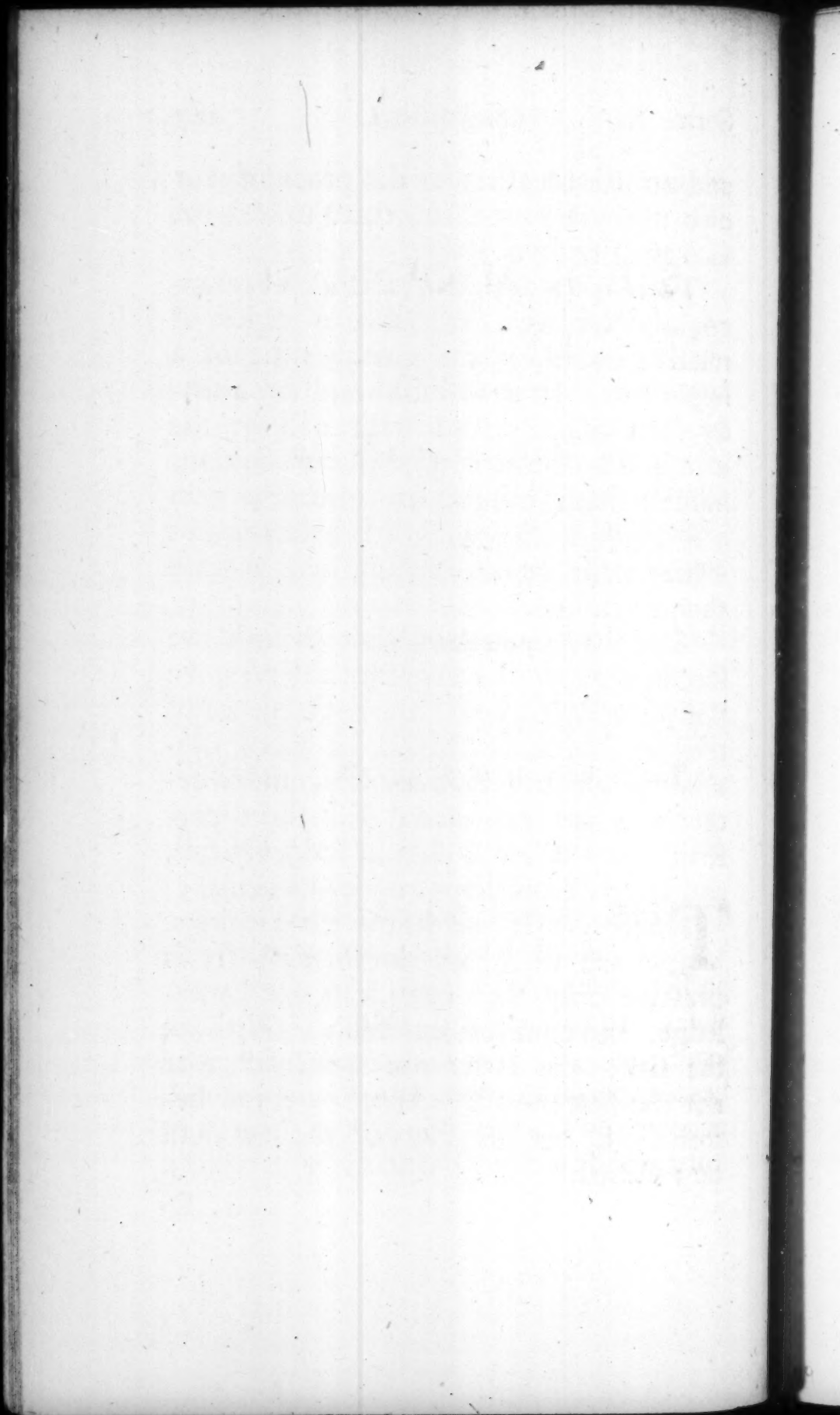
and no less necessary to the peace of our own mind in particular, than to that of society in general.

To make a zealous profession of religion, and yet live in the allowed neglect of relative duties, is the characteristic of a hypocrite. It is to build high on a sandy foundation. And what will be the certain consequence of this our Saviour himself hath taught us. Such a man is so far from being a good christian, that it may truly be said of him, he is "worse than an infidel."

Let us remember, that though we should not, as the Apostle observes, be "always laying again the foundations of religion;" yet we should be often examining whether they are laid, and whether they are well laid; lest the superstructure we build should suddenly fall, and bury all our hopes under its ruins.

Finally; "If we know these things, happy are we if we do them." It is practice only that compleats our knowledge, and confirms our faith. Without the first, the latter are vain. "For not the hearers of the law," are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified."

SER-



S E R M O N X I.

ON CENSORIOUSNESS.

MATTHEW VII. I.

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

THE general precepts and prohibitions of scripture are usually expressed in such a latitude, that if we were always to understand them in a strict sense, and to take that meaning which lies uppermost, we should frequently pervert the laws of God, and turn our duty upside down. Particularly in respect
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of the prohibition in the text; to understand it absolutely, and without proper exceptions and limitations, would be taking it in such a sense, as is neither consistent with the nature and reason of things, nor the very being of human society. It could not possibly be intended to have any relation to the judicial proceedings of magistrates, whose office it is to sit in judgment; to condemn and punish evil-doers. Nor could it be designed as a bar to the just admonitions and reproofs of any lawful superiors. Even among equals, and private persons, it could not extend to all kinds of judgment. There are some cases and characters which ought to be, and indeed must be, unavoidably judged, and universally condemned, as far as they are known. And in such as are less notorious, it may be proper, in some circumstances, that they should neither be overlooked, nor passed over in silence.

But the practice forbidden in the text is of a very different kind from any of these, or the like exceptions. Namely, when private persons judge one another, either in thought, or in word, secretly or openly, without reason, without grounds, without

without evidence, or perhaps against it: when they judge their brethren rashly, unadvisedly, partially, unjustly, uncharitably, or contemptuously: when they pass their judgments and censures in the dark, and shoot out their arrows at random: when they run into invectives giddily and blindly; and pronounce sentence, not according to the merits of the cause, but according to some humour, fancy, prejudice, or passion: when they charge men with faults, which they never really committed, or magnify what they have: when they aggravate every small blemish, and spread a little blot over a whole character: when they are ready to behold and blame the least motes in the eyes of others, and at the same time overlook beams in their own: when in dubious cases, instead of putting the fairest constructions on mens actions, they pick out the worst, in opposition to all the rules both of charity and equity: when they not only take cognizance of overt-acts, but pretend to judge of mens secret thoughts, designs, purposes, and affections: in fine, when "fitting in the seat of the scornful," they raise injurious imputations, and, either
malici-

maliciously or wantonly, dictate scandal, and propagate reproach.

These, and all such like practices, are, without question, prohibited in the text; as appears not only from the reason of the thing, but the whole tenor of scripture. Whatever judging, whatever censoring, is contrary to truth and justice, humanity and charity, civility, and good manners, is here meant and implied, and is expressly forbidden. The generality of christians seem either not to know this, or not to regard it. For how otherwise could they so notoriously transgress this branch of their duty? How prone are they, upon the slightest occasions, to judge rigorously, and to think and speak hardly of one another! Though they profess a religion that breathes nothing but peace and love, and the very essence of which is charity; yet a spirit of disaffection, censoriousness, and slander, too often finds a way into their minds, corrupts their tempers, and diffuses a secret venom through their whole behaviour. How frequently do they sit in judgment on one another's character, traducing and vilifying whom they please, and when they think fit! As if ill words
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and hard speeches, passed for nothing; and no account was to be given of them! Little courts of inquisition are set up, and a kind of tribunal erected in most companies, where men's conduct is examined, their actions are canvassed, and sentence is passed, according to the humours and inclination of these officious inquisitors. Is there any subject of conversation more common, or more fashionable, than the faults and follies of mankind? A copious subject, God knows; if all of us had not work enough at home, in rectifying and reforming what is amiss in ourselves. Do we really and sincerely desire a public reformation? the likeliest way in the world to succeed, is for every man to undertake his own. To neglect our own case, and at the same time make ourselves very busy with other people's, is certainly beginning at the wrong end, and can produce nothing but mischief. In order to bring us off from this way of thinking and acting, I shall, in this discourse point out the principal causes and occasions of such a censorious disposition; and shew the great evil and malignity of it.

To what other causes can we ascribe this censorious disposition, than pride and

vanity, ill-will and envy, indolence and idleness? These are, doubtless, the chief.

It is frequently owing to the pride of our hearts, and an immoderate degree of self-love, that we are so prone to judge and censure our brethren. Whenever we set too high a value on ourselves, we are always under a temptation of disparaging others. And the higher we stand in our own esteem, the greater will be the temptation, and the more apt we shall be to look about us with contempt. If our vanity make us very solicitous to distinguish ourselves, and we find, as it often happens, that we cannot rise in a regular way, cannot advance above the common level; then the only expedient left, for distance and distinction, is to depress our neighbours. It may be in our power to debase them, though we be not able to exalt ourselves. And hence we are naturally tempted to make use of the vile methods before mentioned; to cast a blemish on other men's names, and sully their characters, in order to make our own appear the fairer upon a comparison. To which may be added, that pride and self-conceit make us apt to look upon those things

things as faults and misdemeanours, which are really none at all. If other men pay not the same deference to our understandings that we do ourselves; if they presume to differ from us in opinion, and refuse to think, speak, and act, just as we would have them, they will be in danger of incurring our displeasure, and provoking our censures. Our vanity cannot bear contradiction, and therefore we make a crime of it, and treat it accordingly. Hence much opprobrious language, and many injurious reflections; and we are therefore petulant, censorious, and abusive, because we are vain, arrogant, and proud. In short, from this corrupt fountain flows a great share of those bitter waters, which infect all societies, and poison human life. But,

Another cause of censoriousness, and that a very fruitful one, is hatred and ill-will; which generally exerts itself in uncharitable thoughts, and groundless censures. It frequently gives such a bent to the mind, and such a bias to the judgment, that scarce any evidence is sufficient to counterpoise it. Dislike and disaffection are extremely apt to corrupt and pervert men's faculties. They sometimes

blind their eyes, and sometimes make them see double. Hence it comes to pass, that while many things good and praise-worthy, are utterly over-looked, the least blemish is fastened on, and magnified beyond all measure and proportion. So great are the partialities and prepossessions of ill-will, that it shall neither suffer men to think reasonably, nor speak honestly. Their sentiments are infected, and their language tainted. While hatred is fermenting and festering in their hearts, the "poison of asps is under their lips." Such is the nature of this perverse passion, that it blots the fairest characters, and blackens every thing it touches: turns honour into ignominy, merit into mischief, and virtue into vice. And when it happens to be accompanied with envy, it is still more turbulent and outrageous. Envy heightens and enflames it where it is, and produces it where it is not; gives it greater force, and a keener edge; and both together make men eager, and restless, and furious, in their persecutions. The envious man not only grudges the prosperity of his neighbour, but is oftentimes exceedingly mortified and afflicted at the sight of it. Be-
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ing out of patience at his success and advancement in the world, he wickedly wishes, and too often endeavours, to bring him down again. If this be out of his power, and he cannot accomplish his design any other way, he attacks his good name, and strikes at his reputation. Hence a train of insinuations, suggestions, censures, calumnies. Hence various arts of secret detraction, or open defamation. In short, great pains are taken, and all endeavours used, to gratify an infamous passion, at the expence very often of truth, charity, probity, and justice. But,

A habit of censoriousness is sometimes derived from milder and more innocent causes. It may be, and sometimes is, occasioned by superfluity of leisure, and want of better employment. When men's time hangs upon their hands, their thoughts and tongues are apt to run adrift, and to wander from object to object, from subject to subject, just as it happens. And thus without pride, without malice, without envy, they fall into this practice, not innocently indeed, but insensibly; it may be through mere wantonness, and for amusement; perhaps to keep up conversation, and as a help

to discourse, hereby they are drawn into rash judgments, censures, and reflections, which are carelessly thrown about them, as the fool is represented in scripture, tossing firebrands merely for sport. As if idleness could give any man a privilege to be injurious! Or impertinence atone for calumny and scandal! But, in fact and reality, it often happens, though a seeming contradiction, that want of business makes men busy-bodies; and they rail and revile, because they have nothing else to do. From this brief survey of the causes and occasions of rash judging and censuring, we may evidently perceive, that it always springs from a mean and ignoble original, and very often from such a one as is altogether base and detestable. But the odious nature of this practice will be more evident if we proceed to consider the great evil and malignity of it, which will appear in several respects. For it implies great presumption and impiety towards God, great injustice towards men, and great folly in respect of ourselves.

It is an invasion of God's prerogative. In such cases as we have been considering, no man has any right, any authority, to
judge

judge his brethren. The Apostle speaks of it with a kind of surprise and indignation. "Who art thou," says he, "that judgest another's servant? To his own master he standeth, or falleth." Whatever judicial powers may be delegated to magistrates, and other superiors; yet how does it appear, that private christians are ordinarily possessed of any such right? Where do we read, that either judgment, or vengeance, belongeth unto them? By what authority do they sit as judges over one another? And not only so, but turn accusers, and even executioners? Not indeed in respect of men's lives, but what is sometimes equally dear, their reputations. These are commonly used and dealt with at pleasure; though, in truth and reality, they have no more to do with the one, than they have with the other. But further, this practice implies a kind of impious pretension to one of the divine attributes. Most certain it is, that we pass judgment in many cases, and on many occasions, when we cannot possibly have any ground to go upon, or know any thing at all of the matter; unless we can see into men's hearts, and "understand

their thoughts afar off." The goodness or badness of many actions depends on such circumstances, as can only be known to God, and a man's own conscience. As then we have no right to judge; so, in many cases, neither have we ability: nor can we pretend to it without the highest arrogance and presumption. Again; considering the goodness of God, and his gracious treatment of us all; how impious and ungrateful must it be to proceed against our fellow-creatures by quite contrary rules! Have we not all the reason in the world to follow, as far as we can, this divine example? And are we not obliged in gratitude to observe it in the case before us? Has he ever exercised towards us so much patience, gentleness, kindness, and long-suffering; and shall we deal hardly, severely, unrighteously, and cruelly, with his subjects and servants; who wear his image, and belong to his family? How unsuitable and ungrateful a return is this to the goodness of God! And what an indignity to our common Patron, and Benefactor! But,

This practice likewise offers great injury and injustice to men. This will appear by
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considering the damage that is done by it, and the unrighteous and dishonourable method of doing it. Concerning the former I shall only need to observe, that to rob men of their good names, is to deprive them of a possession which is, and must be, highly valued by them. This is made natural and necessary by the original principles of our minds. To which must be added, that, in respect of a considerable part of mankind, prosperity and success in the world depends upon reputation. To blemish their character is to blast their credit; and both together amount to a damage of the deepest nature. And what greatly heightens the injury, is that, in a great measure, it is often irreparable. The wounds which are made in mens reputation are rarely and with difficulty healed; and when they are, yet they generally leave scars behind them. But to proceed; this practice is not only injurious in its consequences, but every way unjust in itself. Censorious persons, as I before took notice, often judge in the dark; often censure what they understand nothing of; often condemn both men and things, merely from a vain, or wanton, or perverse humour,

without any grounds or evidence at all. Sometimes they rashly charge men with things that were never done; at other times find fault with such actions as are perfectly innocent, and perhaps commendable. If any thing done have but a suspicious appearance, a dubious outside, or a disagreeable circumstance; this is commonly enough for their purpose; they seldom look any deeper, enquire any further. What the agent's aim or intention might be; that they rarely either know, consider, or care. And when they do happen to hit upon such points, as are both really facts, and really faults; they are so far from making fair and favourable allowances, that they frequently magnify and misrepresent; swelling the account, encreasing the blame, and aggravating the charge, beyond all bounds of sobriety and truth. In short, without regarding either evidence or equity; their usual practice is to judge at large, to reflect at random, and condemn at a venture. The notorious injustice of such proceedings needs no proof. They shew themselves sufficiently in their own naked colours. However, it may be proper to add, that if they, who are addicted to such

such a practice, cannot, or will not, see the iniquity of it; yet they can feel it, when it comes home upon themselves. Whenever false or groundless reflections are thrown upon them, they are sure to complain in their turn, and as loudly as any. Might not then their own consciences put them in mind, that they ought not to do to others what they cannot endure should be done to themselves? If this be not reasonable, it is impossible to say what is. But further; another circumstance that renders this practice still more base and dishonourable, is, that such censures are usually thrown out behind men's backs; and vented only for the most part in close communications, and private scandal; and that in direct opposition to the law of God, which denounces a curse against him, "who smiteth his neighbour secretly." And without question the case is the same, whether he be thus smitten in his person, or his property: I say, his property, because every man's good name is his undoubted property, till it be fairly forfeited. This circumstance must undoubtedly be a great aggravation of the crime we are speaking of. Thus attack-

ing men at a distance, and behind their backs, is like assaulting children and cripples, who are utterly incapable of defending themselves. For what defence can the absent make, who know nothing at all of the charge that is brought against them? They are tried, and sentenced, without being heard, or suffered to speak one word in their own vindication. Open calumny, though a great injury, is however more generous than secret slander. The one may be compared to robbing on the high-way; the other to night-thefts, and plunders in the dark. In fine, such a practice is not only doing great wrong; but it is doing it in the meanest, vilest, and most odious manner.

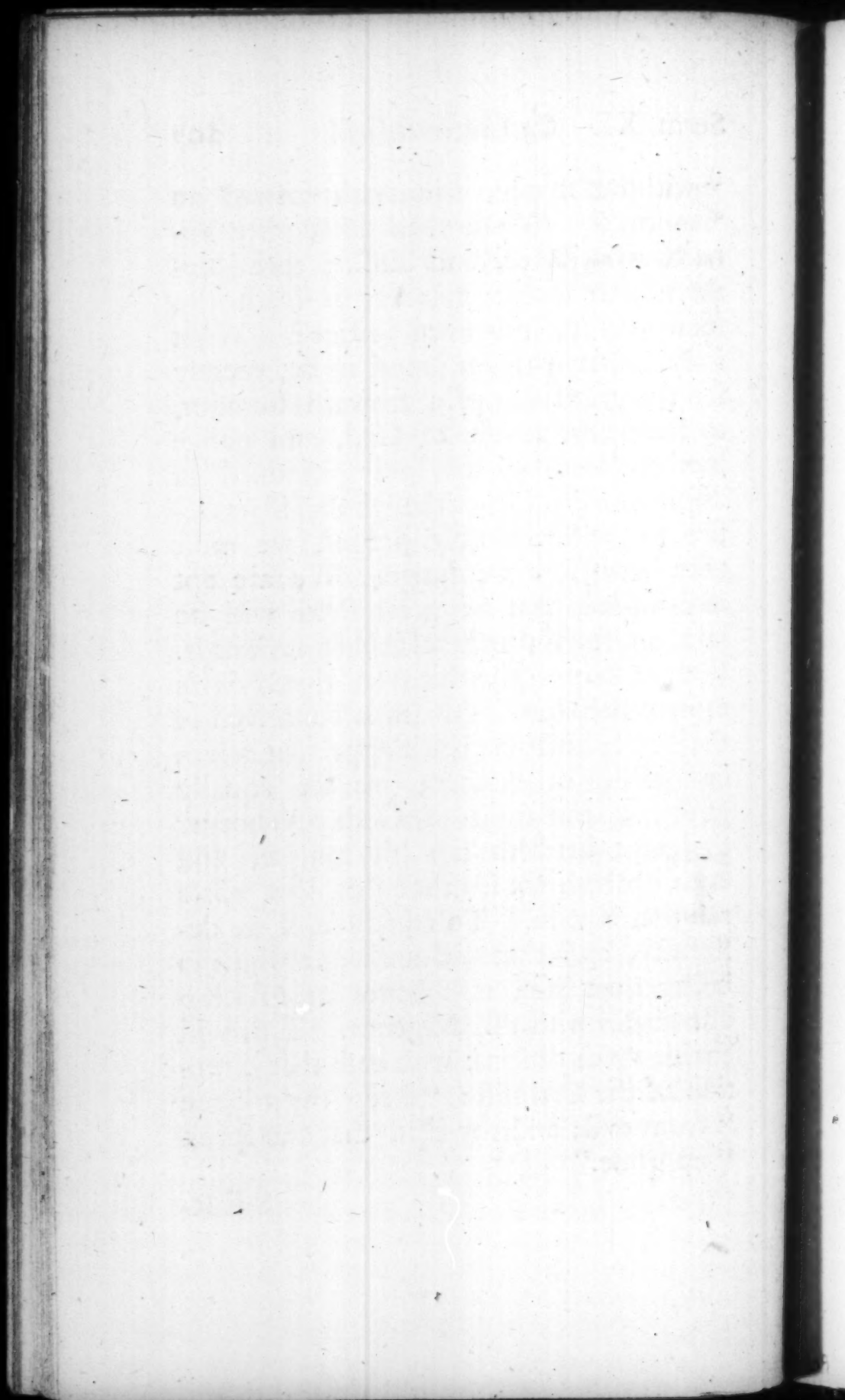
Lastly; As it is great impiety towards God, and injustice towards men; so we may further observe, that it is great folly in respect of ourselves. This might be shewn at large by a great variety of arguments and considerations. But, at present, I shall confine myself to that which is specified in my text; where the ill effect, and mischievous consequence of this vice are plainly pointed at: "judge not that ye be not judged." For we are expressly assured, that "with what measure
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“we mete, it shall be measured to us again.” If it be asked by whom; the answer is, both by God and man; though in different senses and respects. Whoever is forward in censuring, and finding fault with other men, may naturally expect to be treated by them accordingly. No man can pretend to keep a clear character himself, who makes it his business to blemish his neighbour’s. That scandal which he deals in, those hard reflections which he throws about him, will be sure to recoil sooner or later, and fall back upon his own head. In a word, an ill name is in fact, and ever will be, the fate of the censorious. Nor, in the nature of the thing, can it well be otherwise. But in truth this is only a small matter, in comparison of what follows. Rash judgment, and hard censures, not only expose men to the resentment of their fellow-creatures, but render them obnoxious to the just judgment of God himself; who has frequently declared himself the avenger of all such unrighteous practices. Not that he will judge them unjustly, because they have judged others so; but that he will treat men rigorously or gently, severely or mercifully, according
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ing to the manner in which they have treated their fellow-creatures. The great Governor of the world will not fail to judge it in truth and righteousness; let men's judgments be ever so unrighteous, or their provocations ever so great. But for that very reason, and on that very account, he may, and will, have regard to the foregoing rule, the equity of which is universally perceived, and acknowledged. And great pity it is, that it is not more, and better considered. It would surely give a check to those licentious thoughts and uncharitable speeches, which so much abound. Do not all men stand in great need of favour and compassion at the hands of God? How comes it then to pass, that they harden their hearts against each other, and will give no quarter? If God should be extreme to mark what is done amiss, what would become of the best of us? What mortal could stand such a test, or abide such a trial? And yet in one another we not only mark, strictly and severely mark, what is amiss; but oftentimes blame what is not amiss, and condemn the most innocent actions. The scripture declares, that "he shall have judgment
" without

“without mercy, who hath shewed no
“mercy.” What then must they expect, who judge, and censure their brethren after such a manner, as neither to shew mercy, nor even justice? What folly, what madness, must it be, merely for the gratifying of a froward humour, to forfeit the favour of God, and oblige him to shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure? Upon the whole, if we desire to be favourably judged, we must take heed how we judge. We are apt to imagine, that no great stress will be laid on such transient things as words. But we may easily discover, that this is a mere delusion. All sin is conceived in the heart; and whether it appear in words or deeds, or neither; we are equally guilty in the sight of God. Whoever therefore bridleth not his tongue, and even curbeth not his thoughts, that man’s religion is vain. To conclude, if we desire life, and that divine favour which is better than life; it behoves us to keep our hearts with all diligence. This will enable us to observe with ease that direction of the Psalmist: “keep thy tongue
“from evil; and thy lips, that the speak
“no guile.”

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S E R M O N XII.

ON RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE.

MATTHEW VI. 10.

Thy will be done.

THAT the Almighty Being is not only the Creator and Former of all things, but a moral Governor also, is allowed by all men, who have not renounced all religion. And in reality this is the most excellent character, and the highest glory, we can possibly ascribe to him; that he is the sole, supreme, independent Monarch over the universe of
rational

rational beings. For to rule over numberless worlds of mere senseless matter, however unsearchable and astonishing that skill and power which framed them may appear, cannot in reason be thought equally glorious, as to form innumerable systems of intelligent beings, and to govern them by those constitutions, laws, and commands, which spring from unerring wisdom and perfect goodness. In this character principally the Holy Scriptures represent him to us: and in this we are principally interested and obliged to consider him. For if he is a moral Governor, it undeniably follows, that his will is the universal law of his reasonable creatures; and that all mankind, the angels of heaven, and all intelligent beings throughout the creation are bound to say, "Thy will be done."

All true religion consists in resignation and obedience to the will of God. To be governed by a view to our own happiness, is wisdom or prudence: to act with a view to the happiness of others, is virtue or goodness: to be influenced by a regard to the will of God, this alone is piety or religion. How wisely or virtuously soever men may act upon other motives;

motives; yet if an apprehension of the divine will, as requiring or prohibiting certain actions, or appointing certain events, hath no influence upon their minds; they have in reality no religion in them.

In order then to our becoming truly religious, the first thing requisite, is to gain a knowledge of the divine will, in regard to our own dispositions and actions: and in the next place, to impress upon our minds, (which is our present design) a just sense of the obligations we are under to comply with it. To this end, let us particularly attend, first, to the reasonableness; secondly, to the necessity; and, thirdly, to the advantage of submission and obedience to the will of God.

First, to the reasonableness of it. This evidently appears from the nature and perfection of the divine government. For if it be reasonable to comply with the directions of unerring wisdom, and with the designs of infinite goodness; if it be reasonable to do what is in itself the wisest and best to be done, and which is also enjoined by the highest authority; if it be reasonable to submit our own will, which is subject to the blindest errors of
judg-

judgment, and the meanest impulses of passion, to a will which is infinitely remote from all passion, prejudice, and error; then nothing can be so agreeable to reason, as obedience to the will of God; nothing so contrary to it, as an opposition to his will. All justice, equity, right, fitness and propriety are comprehended in wisdom and goodness: and the laws, commands, or appointments of a being who is so good that he always intends the best ends, and so wise that he perfectly understands what means are conducive to those ends, can never in any instance be unjust, unfit, or improper; and disobedience is in every instance contrary to the rectitude, fitness and propriety of action. Submission to the divine will is no other than a conformity to the true nature, order, constitution, and relations of things which the wisdom of God hath established, and a subservience to those ends for which he established them. And as the ultimate end or purpose of the Almighty Being in creating and governing the universe, is the greatest good; so an opposition to his will, is attempting what lies in our power to destroy the good of the world, and to involve

volve it in confusion and misery; and instead of becoming the willing instruments of his providence in promoting the most excellent designs, making ourselves the authors of evil, and becoming the plagues and nufances of the creation.

The reasonableness of yielding an entire obedience to the will of God, will further appear, from considering the relation we bear to him, as his creatures and dependents; and his character in regard to us, as our Maker, Preserver, and Benefactor; who has therefore an absolute unalienable right of dominion over us, and of property in us. We are his by every possible claim of nature and of right; and he may do what he will with his own, and dispose of us as he alone shall think fit: and we cannot possibly have a right to dispute his will, oppose his designs, or censure his proceedings in any instance. Nothing is more familiar to mankind than a sense of the obligations arising from the different relations among men, and the inferior, subordinate and dependent condition of some in respect to others. The relation of parents and children, master and servants, magistrate and subjects, naturally imply authority
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and government on one hand, and a duty of submission and obedience on the other: and nothing would be thought more unreasonable and absurd, than to deny such obligations. But all the reasons, which can be alledged for submission in any case to any kind of human authority, are infinitely more strong and conclusive for submission, in every instance, to the authority and disposal of the Supreme Lord and Father of all intelligent beings. The lowest creature upon earth cannot be so dependent upon or obliged to any earthly superior, as the highest creatures are to the great Sovereign of the universe. And therefore no person can be under so many or so strict obligations to obey the commands of any superior in the world, as are incumbent on all men at all times to obey the will of God. More especially, where there is not only the most absolute dependence, but also the greatest benefits received, and the highest power and authority are joined to perfect goodness; there the reason and obligation of obedience are still more binding; and receive an additional strength from every instance we experience of that goodness. And disobedience,
which

which is always unnatural and unreasonable, becomes aggravated with the charge of ingratitude, and an abuse of divine mercy and favour.

And let it be observed, that all these arguments serve to evince the reasonableness of submission to the divine will universally, even in those instances, if there be any, in which we are not able to discern the utility, or expediency, or even the justice of his commands and appointments. For however things may appear to our weak and narrow understandings; we have a certain principle to proceed upon: that the laws and appointments of his supreme wisdom and goodness are always right, and conducive to worthy ends; and that if they do not appear so to us, it is because our apprehension and judgment of them may be often false, and is always imp

In regard to our active obedience, such instances can hardly occur: because the laws by which God governs his intelligent creatures are adapted by his infinite wisdom to their nature, capacity and condition; and therefore are such, on the whole, as their own understandings can judge of, and perceive the justice and
fitness

fitness of them, and the beneficent ends they are intended to answer. But in respect of our passive submission, it must be acknowledged, that there are many events in the course of Divine Providence, the justice and fitness of which we cannot possibly discover; in which it is notwithstanding our reasonable duty to acquiesce with entire resignation; and from a conviction of our own ignorance, and of the unsearchable extent of divine wisdom, to say, "Thy will be done."

But in every instance, submission and obedience are the more reasonable, and the contrary the more inexcusable, in proportion to our apprehension and conviction of the excellence and utility of the duties required. And therefore when we consider, how reasonable, important and useful the common duties of religion are, how perfectly suitable to the abilities of human nature, and the condition of human life, and how plainly conducive to private and public good, as well as the disgraceful nature and pernicious effects of the contrary vices; to neglect such duties, in opposition to the will, in contempt of the authority, and in defiance of the justice, of the greatest and wisest
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of beings, and the sovereign judge of the universe, cannot but appear to be a conduct inconsistent with the character of a reasonable creature, and attended with aggravating circumstances.

Secondly; Let us proceed to consider the necessity of obeying the will of God; (I mean a moral necessity) as we value our own life, safety and happiness, and would avoid misery and destruction. For we cannot escape his power and justice; we cannot throw off his government, and exempt ourselves from his jurisdiction: we cannot abandon his territories and find protection under any foreign potentate. His dominion is universal, and his kingdom is over all creatures. We are, and cannot but be, the subjects of his government: and must of necessity, either live under his protection and by his favour, or endure all the penalties his justice may see fit to inflict. And it is absurd and dangerous to imagine, that the great Governor and Judge of the whole world will permit, what no wise governor on earth will dispense with, the presumptuous violation of his known will, and suffer his authority to be insulted, and his laws trampled on, with impunity.

The same reasons and ends for which the Almighty sees fit to give laws to his subjects, extend equally to the execution of those laws, by an appointment of rewards and punishments; without which the very design of government will be frustrated. And to suppose that the omniscient ruler of the world will be indifferent to the actions of men, and extend his protection and favour equally to the obedient and disobedient, is supposing him to act contrary to his own wise and good design in making the world, and to destroy his own authority and government, by which the order and happiness of the world is supported. No society can be maintained without government. The wills of finite, frail and mutable creatures are always various, and may often be wrong: and the end and purpose of laws and constitutions is to incline, or compel, every particular will into one general will, intending the preservation and good of the whole. And this is to be done, principally by a due distribution of rewards and punishments; by protecting the innocent, rewarding the virtuous, and destroying or chastising the transgressor.

Thirdly;

Thirdly; We are to consider the advantage of living in obedience to the will of God. By studying to obey the divine laws, and to comply willingly with all his appointments, we may hope to gain his favour and protection; the protection of the all-wise and Almighty ruler of the whole world and uncontrollable disposer of all events: which is the only proper and sufficient security against the evils incident to us, and the only solid foundation of contentment and satisfaction to the mind. If from an unfeigned reverence of the divine majesty, as supreme Governor of the world, we sincerely endeavour to understand and do his will, we may on good grounds hope for his mercy; and that he will at last distinguish us from all the presumptuous violators of his laws; and notwithstanding our numerous imperfections, bestow upon us some marks of his grace and favour. The gospel of our Saviour, which reveals to us a future state, hath given us the highest assurance, that if we imitate the example of obedience which he hath set before us, and "do the will of our father in heaven," we shall obtain like him a resurrection from the dead, and be raised

to a state of immortality and glory. This sublime prospect is set before us for our encouragement; and is sufficient to reconcile our minds to the greatest difficulties we can possibly undergo, in submission to the will of God.

In every well governed state or kingdom on earth, the public advantage and happiness results from obedience to those laws of the community which are framed for, and that will of the sovereign which intends, the preservation and good of the whole: much more, in the universal government of the wisest and best of beings, whose will is perfect reason, the greatest good must arise from the obedience of all his rational subjects. By this chain the whole intellectual system is connected, and the infinite multitude of various and discordant wills of all intelligent creatures are united, and conspire to one divine end; and the purpose of infinite wisdom is accomplished in the social harmony and happiness of the universe. To this end, an infliction of punishments, in chastising or cutting off the refractory and rebellious, is no less necessary, than a distribution of rewards to the virtuous and obedient. And thus the happiness of each individual

dividual is made to depend on his voluntary subjection to the order and good of the whole.

The greatest happiness of mankind in this world ariseth from their observance of the laws of their nature and the revealed will of their all-wise Creator and Governor. And their future happiness, when raised to a higher state of existence in another world, will arise, in a still higher degree, from their obedience to the will of God. For the greater powers and faculties any intelligent creature is endued with, and the more enlarged his sphere of action, so much the greater are his obligations to know and obey the divine will; and the more momentous the consequence, both to himself and others, of his obedience or disobedience. This shews the vast importance and benefit of acquiring as early as possible an habitual reverence of the Supreme Being and attention to the discoveries of his will: that by being inured to piety and obedience in our present state, we may be qualified to act in a higher sphere, and to enjoy a sublimer happiness, than this state affords. On the other hand, by laying aside the fear of God, and indulging to our evil

inclinations in opposition to his known will, we shall not only be disqualified for enjoying the dignity and happiness of a higher state, but shall be utterly excluded from it, and, in just punishment of our negligence and disobedience, be doomed to eternal destruction.

The main purpose of our living in this world, and what is of greatest importance to be learned in it, is obedience. The constitution of nature is framed in order to instruct and train us up in the habits of obedience. To this end mankind are brought into the world in a state of infancy, weak, dependent, and absolutely subject to the direction and authority of parents; to the same end they are placed, when advanced to years of maturity, in a social and subordinate state, subject to the will of superiors, and to human law and government. The whole procedure of events is continually teaching us, that we are not to make our own will the law of our actions, nor expect that every thing should bend to our inclinations; but that we are to be governed by a superior will, and ought to be continually bending and molding the temper of our minds, to a conformity with the constitutions of infinite

finite wisdom, and the will of the Almighty sovereign of the world. All the divine dispensations, and particularly the revelation of the gospel, are directed to the same end; to establish the kingdom of God, or the habits of obedience to his will in the minds of his rational creatures. Thus the frame of nature, the events of life, the dictates of reason, the doctrines of revelation, the obligations of duty and gratitude, the motives of hope and fear, the views of another world and an eternal state, all conspire to impress upon us a sense of obedience due to the will of the Supreme Governor and Father of the whole intelligent creation.

Let us then with the deepest reverence of soul, adore the eternal all-perfect being, the sovereign disposer of all things. Let us learn to submit our appetites, inclinations and desires to his righteous will; and cheerfully resign our interests and lives to his wise disposal: and in the most difficult trials of life and of death, let us say, after the example of our great Lord and Saviour, when he was going to suffer death upon the cross in obedience to God, “not my will, but thine be done.”

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That we may not be found at last among these negligent and disobedient servants, "who knew their Lord's will, and did it not," and who "shall be beaten with many stripes;" but may obtain the high applause, "well done good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord;" God of his infinite mercy grant through Jesus Christ our Lord.

S E R M O N XIII.

IRRELIGION A FREQUENT ATTENDANT
ON GREAT RICHES.

LUKE XII. 21.

*So is he that layeth up treasure for himself,
and is not rich towards God.*

THE riches of the world being often
the fruits of injustice and oppres-
sion, one wealthy man's estate being rais-
ed perhaps upon the ruin and poverty of
hundreds, and built upon the tears and
cries

cries of widows and orphans; and yet being sometimes represented in scriptures as the blessing of God upon the honest labour and industry of men diligent in their calling or profession; or as the reward bestowed upon a virtuous contentment, and resignation of mind to the providence of the Almighty: a great fortune being often used to very ill purposes, to the increase of luxury and wantonness, to the encouragement of vice, and to the mischief of all who are the unhappy neighbours of an over-grown rich man; and yet being in itself applicable to the best uses in the world, to the promotion of virtue and holiness, to the advancement of the honour of God, and to the setting forward the common good and happiness of mankind: there being such different ways both of getting and enjoying the riches of the world, the profession of them has been either valued or despised, condemned or approved by moralists and divines, according to the view they have had of them with relation to the several methods by which they are obtained and employed. “The hand of the diligent,” saith Solomon, “maketh rich:” and again, “The blessing of the Lord it
“maketh

“maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow
 “with it;” yet at other times he observed riches that had no blessing in them,
 “There is a sore evil which I have seen
 “under the sun, namely, riches kept for
 “the owners thereof to their hurt.”

From this observation, I think, all disputes about riches may be reconciled: Where they are ill got, or ill used, they are an hurt to the owner; where they are honestly got, and worthily enjoyed, they are a blessing to the owner, and through his means, to many others. Thus far the case is plain: but then it is a matter of further consideration, to see what the iniquity is that generally follows a large possession. The rich man's crimes are commonly considered under the head of profuseness or covetousness: to the first are referred luxury, intemperance, and all the sins of pleasure which wealth furnishes and supports: to the second head are reduced fraud, oppression, want of kindness and charity, and all the iniquity that attends the unreasonable desire of getting or preserving an estate. All these indeed are very great and too common faults among rich men: but there is still a more secret iniquity that sticks

close to great possessions, and which does not always discover itself in the ill effects before-mentioned: a man may have an estate honestly gotten, and in the eye of the world he may use it in all respects as he ought, and yet still be a very wicked rich man. What, you will say, although he be free from covetousness, given to hospitality, and liberal to the poor? if these things will not preserve riches from the contagion of guilt, what will? But before you judge too hastily in this cause, you must consider that virtue does not consist merely in the outward act; it is not the material action that denominates a man good or bad, but the judgment in this case must regard the principle from whence the actions flow. A prodigal man squanders his money without regard, or distinction of persons or occasion: where tenderness and good-nature attend upon this vice, the poor and miserable often gather largely of the prodigal man's scatterings: but will you call this christian charity, where perhaps the duty owing to God was never once thought on, and of all that was given, not one farthing offered as tribute to the great Giver of every good gift; but the
fountain

fountain head was corrupt, though the stream indeed flowed in no ill channel?

If we consider the parable of the rich man, of which the words of the text are the moral or application, we shall discover what particular evil in riches our Saviour pointed at, and designed to correct by the instruction of this parable. The story is this: "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said this will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" After which follow the words of the text, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

The first thing to be enquired into is the true design and meaning of this parable.

ble. In the fifteenth verse of this chapter our Lord warns his hearers to "beware of covetousness:" in this parable he represents the foolish rich man enlarging his barns, that he might heap up his goods in store: in the text he warns us of the danger of laying up treasures for ourselves, whilst we neglect being rich towards God: and in the thirty-third verse he exhorts us to "sell that we have, and give alms: to provide for ourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth." From these circumstances it is commonly understood, that covetousness was the rich man's crime; that enlarging his barns to receive his plentiful crop was the instance and proof of it; and that the only way to be rich towards God, is to sell our goods, and to distribute them in works of charity and mercy: thus this parable is commonly understood, but, I think, not rightly. Our Saviour, it is true, introduces this parable in consequence of the caution he had given against covetousness: but he had before given a reason against covetousness, "For a man's life," says he, "consisteth

“sifteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth:” and the parable was added to illustrate this reason given against covetousness, and not to display the folly or vice of covetousness in general: the rich man is not described in the colours of a covetous man; his wealth arose from no oppression or usury, it was the product of his own land, which has always been esteemed as honest a way of being rich, and to proceed as much from the immediate blessing of God, as any whatever: the ground was his own; he is not said to withhold from the rightful possessor by violence or by fraud. Thus far then there is no mark of covetousness, or of any other fault: but when he found his crop to be great, he enlarged his barns; and this perhaps was his crime. But where was the iniquity of this? Does not every man endeavour that his barns should be in proportion to the product of his land? May not the most charitable man in the world have a barn, or build a barn large enough to receive his crop, and yet be guiltless? Nay, it is evident from hence, that covetousness, properly so called, was not his fault; for he built his barn to lay up stores for many

ny years, proposing rest and satisfaction in the goods already gotten, and intending to trouble himself no further about wealth; he had enough. A covetous man would rather have turned his goods into money, and put it to usury, and slaved on still for more: besides, in the twentieth verse, where God is brought in reproving the rich man for his folly, there is not one word said of his building large barns to receive his fruits: "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." But if the large barn had been the crime, the consistency of the parable requires, that the reproof should have pointed to the crime, and it should have been said, thou fool, this this night shall the lightning from heaven consume thy large barns, or something to this purpose. Further, neither upon this is it rightly concluded from the circumstances of the parable, that this rich man was void of charity to the poor: he is represented as fully satisfied in his abundance: there had been much more reason to have thought him uncharitable, had he been represented as not contented with his abundance, but still fearful of poverty and want; which is often the case,
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and the pretence of the rich uncharitable man. Nor, lastly, is it reasonable to limit and confine the notion of being rich towards God to works of charity only; all good works in proportion make us rich towards God. St. Paul speaks in general of the richness of good works, and St. James of the richness of faith: and in the text, to be rich towards God does particularly signify, to trust and rely upon his Providence for our life and support, in opposition to relying on treasures of our own heaping up, or large barns of our own building and filling; as I shall shew presently.

Having thus far examined the common interpretation of the parable, and shewn how much short it falls of our Saviour's true aim and intent, I shall now endeavour to point out the true meaning of it, which will lead us into the right sense and understanding of the text.

When our Saviour exhorted his hearers to "beware of covetousness," he supported his advice with this reason, "For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth:" this reason he illustrates and confirms in the following parable. The
aim

aim then of the parable is to shew, that wealth is no security; that it is folly to pretend to arm ourselves against the accidents or casualties of life by heaping up treasures, which nothing can protect us against but the good providence and care of our heavenly Father. In this point all the circumstances of the parable meet; the rich man is represented as flowing in plenty, so that he was necessitated to pull down his barns and storehouses in order to enlarge them: this plenty made him forget God, and vainly imagine that he had a security in his own hands against all the calamities of life: his riches made him promise himself many happy days and years: in which confidence he thus expressed himself, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." This folly God reproves him for, and checks him in his presumptuous security, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" Thou shalt die, and what then must become of those mighty pledges of thy security? So little will they avail thee, that they themselves will fall under

under the power of another, never to return to thee again. "So is he," says our Lord, "who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." These words being the moral of this parable, must be expounded so as to answer the design of the parable; and therefore to lay up treasures for ourselves, must signify to lay up treasures for our own security, as if we meant to become thereby the carvers of our own fortune: consequently, to be rich towards God, being placed in opposition to laying up treasures for ourselves, must denote our placing our confidence and trust in him, our endeavouring to procure his favour and protection, as knowing that in them only is all our hope and stability.

From this representation it is easily collected what is the dangerous circumstances attending riches, which makes them often prove so fatal to their owners, namely, That they beget an irreligious confidence and presumption in the heart of man, inclining him to forget God who formed him. A sense and feeling of want is a constant remembrance of our dependence, and is ever calling upon us to look up to him, upon whose mercy and
goodness

goodness we exist. A life spent in these difficulties, and supported beyond all the reasonable hopes of narrow circumstances, suggests to us every moment how wonderfully God has brought us on our way, when we had neither staff nor shoes nor money in our scrip: these are the natural thoughts and suggestions of poverty. But a man who lives in the midst of plenty, and fears no want, is not apt to think often of the need he has to be assisted: he that remembers nothing, but that his large estate has ever supplied both his necessities and superfluities, will hardly reflect further, so as to come to an acknowledgment that God has been his stay ever since he came into the world. This is the common case of riches; they steal the heart from God, and render it insensible to the duties of religion, by taking away the foundation of all religion, the sense of our dependence on the Providence and care of heaven. This made our Lord cry out, "How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven!" This insolence, this pride of mind, which is the proper growth of the rich man's soil, chokes all the seeds of virtue and holiness, and leaves no room
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for the plants planted by our heavenly Father to thrive and prosper: even charity itself, the choicest flower of the rich garden, flees the neighbourhood of this poisonous weed, and will not take root by it.

It is this irreligiousness of mind, this disregard to God and every thing that is good, which are the too common companions of a plentiful fortune, that have made riches to be so hardly spoken of in scripture. If you examine particular places, you will find regard is still had to this corruption of mind. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, it is not easy to find upon what account the rich man was condemned, as the case is generally supposed to be stated: the rich man is said to be "clothed in purple and fine linen, and to fare sumptuously every day." He was not covetous it seems, he lived answerably to his fortune: his life is represented as a scene of ease and pleasure, but is not taxed with any notable vice or enormity: he is said to fare sumptuously, which I take to be a description of his state and grandeur, rather than an imputation of any vice; for he is not accused either of gluttony or drunkenness. But
was

was he not, you will say, uncharitable? for poor Lazarus lay at his door, "desiring the crumbs that fell from his table." This circumstance rather shews, that the poor used to be fed at his door. Had the intent of the parable been to have represented this rich man as hard to the poor, it would have been said, that his servant drove away the poor from the door; or at least, when the poor came, that they were sent empty away: neither of which is said; but Lazarus is represented as feeding upon the crumbs of the rich man's table. And this is the image given us of their different conditions in this world: the rich man sat down to a sumptuous table; the poor man was glad to feed upon the crumbs and scraps that fell from it. The end of these men is well known: Lazarus was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man was tormented in hell flames. What then does the parable teach us? Why, it represents to us the dangerous state of great men, who live without the fear or love of God in their hearts; and the much happier condition of the poor, who have their share of misery in this world, which often leads to glory and immortality

lity hereafter. If you look forward, you will see this is the true aim of the parable: when the rich man applies to Abraham for relief, and finds none; he then petitions for his brethren, that they might be warned against the danger that hung over their heads, against coming into the same sad state with himself. Here you may well imagine that he would desire they should be particularly warned against those crimes which had proved his ruin. Had he burnt in the flames for intemperance or uncharitableness, he would have begged that his brethren might have been exhorted to flee the sins that were his tormentors: but of this nothing is said: he only desires that Lazarus might go in quality of a prophet, to testify the truth and reality of a future state: which plainly shews, that his condemnation was the effect of irreligion and unbelief: he lived at ease, and God was not in all his thoughts. To his request Abraham replies, "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them:" shewing us again, that the fault of these rich men was contempt of the Prophets, and irreligion. The rich man tacitly owns this contempt, both for himself and his brethren,

thren, by saying, "Nay, but if one went from the dead, they will repent:" which was confessing, that they had not reverence enough for Moses and the Prophets, to repent upon their authority and admonition, but wanted some greater motive, which he thought might be found in the appearance of one coming from the grave. From these circumstances it is evident, that the purport of the parable is not to represent to us the heinousness of any one particular crime for which the rich man suffered; but to shew how fatally riches influence the mind to irreligion, and make men forget God; whilst the poor, living in continual want, have a perpetual sense of their dependence, and do in all their distress look up to him from whom cometh their salvation. This sense of dependence creates in the poor man a fear to offend, a desire to please; whilst the rich man, wanting, as he thinks, nothing from God, has no desire to court his favour; but grows negligent and remiss in all the parts of religion, from which it is a very easy step to infidelity.

It is from these considerations that the "love of the world" is said in scripture to be "enmity with God." All vices
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are not attended with hatred and contempt of God; not all the vices that are commonly ascribed to riches: and therefore the love of the world, that is enmity with God, is not to be expounded by covetousness or uncharitableness, or any other particular vice; but denotes the rich man's temper and disposition, the habit of mind that grows out of a plentiful estate: and this indeed is very commonly enmity with God; inclining men not only to disobey his commands, but, as far as lies in them, to throw him out of the world, and depose him from the throne of heaven.

From what has been discoursed upon this subject, we may learn, where a rich man ought to place his guard: if he is not covetous, or uncharitable, if he is not luxurious and intemperate, so far it is well: but above all, let him take heed, that the pride and insolence of mind, too common in plentiful circumstances, grow not upon him; the pride I mean of self-sufficiency, as if he were able to guide and guard himself through the world, and had not so much need of the care of God over him, as the poor who enjoy nothing: let him learn to know, that in riches are no security; and that he wants

the protection of heaven as much as the poorest wretch in the world. A rich man that has this sense as he ought to have, will in consequence have the other virtues proper to his state: he will be gentle, affable, kind and charitable; and his spirit, in the height of fortune, will be adorned with the meekness of the gospel of Christ. A man of sense need not go far to learn this submission to God in the highest fortune: our Saviour's argument, that follows close after the text, will teach him the reasonableness of the duty: "The life," says he, "is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment." The utmost riches can do, upon the largest concessions made to them, is to provide food and raiment, and such like necessities and conveniences of life. Put the case then, that by being master of a great estate, you are master of food and raiment, and can have them in what quantity or quality you please: what then? Have you less reason, upon this account, to depend upon God, and to implore his aid? Consider a little: to what purpose serves food? Is it not for the support of life? But can food ward off death? Are you, in all your plenty of provisions,

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one jot securer against sickness, or any accident that may rob you of your life, than the poorest man? Will not a tile from a house kill a rich man, as well as a beggar? If this be the case, is it not very absurd to plume yourself, and to think of security, because of your plenty, when life itself, which is more than meat, is still exposed; and for which you can have no security, but in the goodness of God? You have many changes of raiment, and the poor has only rags. What then? Will the gout or stone, or burning fever pay such respect to fine cloaths as not to approach them? Will health always attend upon gold lace and embroidery? If it will, you are right to multiply garments: but if, after all your care for raiment, you must still depend upon God, as well as the beggar, for health and strength of body, how ridiculous is the joy over many changes of garments! "Is not the body more than raiment? Since then you must trust God for your life and strength, because they are things which no care of your own, no degree of wealth can insure; had you not even as good trust him a little farther, and ease yourself of this unreasonable care

for the things of life? From these, and the like considerations, you may see, that dependence upon God is as much the rich man's duty and interest, as it is the poor man's: that to trust God, and to rely on his goodness, is to be rich towards God; and is that sort of riches which will make us easy and happy in this life, and glorious and blessed in that which is to come. By these means we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things that are eternal.

S E R M O N XIV.

THE DUTY OF CHARITY STATED
AND ENFORCED.

PROVERBS III. 27.

*With-hold not good from them to whom it
is due, when it is in the power of thine
hand to do it.*

TO discourse upon any duty in general, without applying to particulars, is little more than idle declamation and empty flourish: it is to let our arrows fly at random, when we should

direct them to a certain mark. That Charity in general is a duty, no one will deny: but there are many, who, on account of particular circumstances, think themselves entirely discharged from the performance of it: many, who, though they own the obligation, yet disown it in its due degrees.

Suffer me then to consider, who are the persons obliged to give to charitable uses, and in what proportion; who are the persons qualified to receive our charity; the manner in which we ought to bestow it: and, to lay before you the motives to this duty.

One would think we should need few arguments to persuade the great, the opulent, and the able, to stand foremost in the rank of the charitable, and to under-take the principal share in this duty. They are stewards, it is true, and must give an account: but happy sure is the steward when his trust is of such a nature, that the more freely he dispenses, the more faithful he shall be accounted: when the merit of his liberality shall be placed, not to his master's, but to his own account: when the prayers of the poor shall draw
down

down upon him the praise and reward of his Lord.

This is a virtue whereof one would hope they would be inclined to shew themselves more eminent patterns; because as their station fits them peculiarly for it, so it denies them the occasions of practising many virtues of another sort. They meet with few affronts, or injuries, or oppressions, to employ the virtues of meekness, forgiveness and patience: they experience but little of hard fortune, less of hard labour, and nothing at all of the distresses of poverty, hunger, and cold and nakedness, to call forth the virtues of patience, and resignation, and an humble reliance on Providence.

Now what more proper method of supplying the absence of these virtues in themselves, than by extending their charity to those very persons who do practise them, by letting their bounty render the practice of them somewhat more easy, by allowing themselves to become, in some measure, the instruments in God's hand of rewarding them?

Their good deeds then ought to bear a proportion to their abilities. God, who is the fountain-head of every good gift,

has made them the channels whereby he intends to convey his blessings to mankind. Their charity may begin at home; but after the stream of it has watered their own garden, they ought not to confine it there; but let it flow abroad to enrich the neighbouring soil, and to dispense plenty and fruitfulness all around.

This is so agreeable to the common notions of mankind, that every one condemns the mean and sordid spirit of that wretch, who, though God has blessed him with abundance, and consequently with a power of blessing others, is yet relentless to the cries of those who have nothing to plead for them, but, what is the most powerful pleader with every generous mind, extreme misery, and nothing to return but their prayers; prayers, poured forth from the fulness of a grateful heart. They look with abhorrence upon a man, who is ever amassing riches without laying any thing out in charitable uses; as greedy as the sea, and as barren as the shore.

Numbers, it is true, think they have done enough in declaiming against the practice of such persons; for upon the great and opulent they think the whole
burden

burden of this duty ought to rest: but for themselves, they being of somewhat a lower class, they desire to be excused. Their circumstances, they say, are but just easy; just sufficient to answer the demands of their families, and their own necessary expences; and therefore they plead utter inability, and expect to be totally exempted from the performance of this duty. But, before this excuse will be of any avail, it behoves them to consider, whether they do not indulge themselves in some expences unsuitable to their rank and condition. If this be the case, it is no slight matter to waste that fortune in idleness and riot, which should make them "feet to the lame, and eyes to the blind;" as a "father to the orphan," and as a "husband to the widow." It is no slight matter to squander away that which, if rightly used, would purchase for them the most valuable treasures; treasures in heaven: but, if abused in unnecessary expences or sinful intemperance, lays a weight upon the soul, which will make them as dead to all sentiments of piety, as they are to those of charity.

Competency will be a word of much too large a signification, if we are to understand by it supplies for costly eating and drinking; supplies for high enjoyment of life; for retinue and equipage. Imaginary wants are boundless, and charity must never begin if it is postponed till these have an end.

He, it is true, is worse than an infidel, who does not provide for his family: but it is as true, that our family ought not to engross all our substance exclusively of the poor, who have a right; even God's right. For some part of what we have is due to God as an acknowledgment that we derive from him the whole: and God has made the poor his substitutes.

I know not whether many of the inferior sort may not have taken up a notion, that they have nothing to do in the works of charity: a notion very false, and withal very dangerous. Rich and poor are equally concerned in the duty, but in proportion to their circumstances. And he that has little, is as strictly bound to give something out of that little, as he that has more is obliged to give more. “If thou hast abundance,

“dance, give alms accordingly ; if
“thou hast but little, be not afraid to
“give according to that little ; for thou
“layest up a good treasure for thyself
“against the day of necessity.” As the
rich are obliged to relieve the poor, so
even the poor are also bound, in propor-
tion to their circumstances, to help one
another. What an advantage was it to
the poor widow, that she, by bringing
her mite only into the treasury, could
thereby exercise a nobler charity than the
greatest of all there had done ! Have
the poor little to give ? Charity does
not consist in much or little, but in do-
ing the best we can, and doing it with a
willing mind. The smallest present ima-
ginable may be the greatest bounty.

What has been the chief bar to the
exercise of this virtue is, the difficulty of
pitching upon any fixed and stated pro-
portion, short of which our charity ought
not to fall : and where the determinate
measure of duty is not or cannot be as-
signed, there men’s interest or covetous-
ness will be ever suggesting excuses for
the non-performance of it. We ought
to adjust our bounty to our abilities ; but,
as there is no fixed standard, we seem

willing to take advantage of that circumstance, and to measure our abilities by our inclination.

In order to remove this impediment, if we are not more disposed to deceive than to direct our consciences, we ought to follow the rule laid down in all doubtful cases; to chuse the part which is least dangerous. As in the gratifications then of eating and drinking, we should rather take too little than too much of our liberty, for fear of being betrayed into intemperance; so in the exercise of charity, we should rather exceed than fall short, for fear of incurring the guilt of uncharitableness.

Farther; It ought to be remembered that one or two occasional acts of charity are not sufficient to denominate a man charitable. He alone is a charitable man whose disposition is always inclined to charity: who is at all times glad to relieve distress when he can, and sorry when he cannot: whose bounty reaches as far as his power extends, whose benevolence takes in all the objects of charity, and whose discretion singles out the most proper.

Which

Which brings me to consider who are the persons qualified to receive our charity.

We ought rather to succour the distressed, than increase the happiness of the easy: because we are to do the most good that we can. In the latter case, it is like giving wine to a man that hath already quenched his thirst; in the former, it is like giving a cordial to a person fainting. According to that of the son of Sirach; "Mercy is seasonable in time of affliction, like clouds of rain in time of drought." It is sending a gracious rain, and refreshing the ground that is weary and parched up. Even the bad, much more the good, are to be relieved in cases of extreme necessity. It is a mistake to imagine that hatred to sin should make us uncompassionate to sinners in extremity. To convince us of this we need only reflect, that if the Son of God had regarded sinners with the same un pitying eye, mankind had never been redeemed. If suffering innocence only gave a title to compassion, the sun had never rose on the unjust; never perhaps on thee, who deniest that mercy to suffering vice, which thou dost expect from God. Our
pity,

pity, the universal language of nature, calls loudly upon us to relieve both the good and the bad, who are just ready to perish. Those then are the most proper objects of relief, who are incapable of relieving themselves. But,

The best charity we can give to the poor that have ability and strength, is to employ them in work, that they may not contract an habit of idleness; and so the public not only lose the advantage of their service, but likewise become charged with an useless incumbrance.

But yet, if such be not able to earn a competent livelihood; if the produce of their labour be not proportionable to the demands of a numerous family; then still they are proper objects of our charity. Nor can there well be a more pitiable case than that of those whose daily drudgery, after the utmost they can do, will not procure daily bread for themselves and their household. To consider a parent, who has toiled out the live-long day in hardship, who yet at night, instead of finding rest, shall find a pain more insupportable than all his fatigues abroad, the cravings of a small helpless family which he cannot satisfy; this is enough
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to give the most lively touches of compassion to every heart that is not past feeling. Certainly when the poor have done all they can for a supply of their necessities; the rich do not do all they ought, if they do not make up, what is wanting, out of their abundance.

If there be any case more deplorable, it is that of theirs, who, after having been accustomed to ease and plenty, are, by some unavoidable reverse of fortune, by no folly or fault of their own, condemned to bear, what they are the least able to bear, the galling load of poverty: who, after having been perhaps fathers to the fatherless in the day of their prosperity, are now become the objects of that charity they were wont so liberally to dispense. These objects plead the more strongly for our relief, because they are the least able to reveal their misery, and make their wants known.

But fatherless children particularly demand our care, to fence their tender bloom of years against the early blasts of vice; to conduct them with a safe but gentle hand through the dangerous stages of infancy, childhood, and youth; at an age, when their minds
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are most susceptible of good impressions; and their memories the most tenacious of any impressions, to give them early notices of piety and virtue; to enable those to become useful members of society, who if turned adrift and left defenceless, would become so many pests and nuisances to it.

And is it not much more discreet and rational to apply our charity to such objects, where there can be no danger of misapplication, than to run the risque of misplacing it upon vagrants and common beggars; who, for aught we know, may be counterfeits; whose greatest want may be that of virtue?

I would not however be misunderstood: when there are strong appearances and symptoms, that these last are in extreme necessity, the good-natured and charitable part is to be preferred. If it happen to be an error, it is at the worst an error on the right side.

Another sort of persons that have a right to our charity, are the sick. Solomon hath observed long ago, that when "heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop," then a good word maketh it peculiarly glad. Reflect therefore seriously

ously and tenderly on the condition of such persons; for they sometimes suffer a good deal from the mere inattention of those about them, who yet could not be brought on any terms to do deliberately, what they apprehended to be cruel or unkind. Let us, in the language of afflicted Job, (for afflicted persons know best how to speak of affliction) "put our soul into their soul's stead:" let us patiently bear those instances of peevishness and fretfulness into which, under such a pressure, they may be apt to fall; imputing them to their distemper, and not to themselves. In a word, let us endeavour to ease their sufferings as heartily as if they were our own; and to bear our own as patiently and resignedly as we generally do those of others.

Some indeed whose dispositions are tender and compassionate, seem to feel so much for and with others, that one cannot help wishing they might feel as little as possible for themselves. They are sure at least of suffering nothing alone. Every one that hath the least tincture of humanity must suffer with them in distress; with them, from whom they are sure to suffer
nothing

nothing by an unkind word or deed.

Let us now consider the manner in which we are to dispense our charity.

Acts of mercy, public and private, have both their peculiar and distinguishing excellencies; neither are to be omitted. To say that because our Saviour has commanded us to give our alms privately, therefore we are not to exercise any acts of public charity; would be as ridiculous as to argue, that because private prayer is commanded, public worship is forbidden. To put our virtue to the test; to try whether it be genuine, (as founded upon a pure unmixed principle of pleasing God, without any sinister views of worldly applause) our Saviour has ordered us to give alms secretly; "and our Father which seeth in heaven will reward us openly." That virtue, on the other hand, might not lose the benefit of public example, he has commanded that, at other times, we "let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven." If all our charity was to be entirely secret, removed from the eye of the world, it would

would decay and dwindle into nothing; just as religion itself would, for want of a conspicuous, exemplary, avowed piety: both the one and the other then stand in great need of a public countenance and encouragement, which stamp a credit upon them in the midst of a crooked and degenerate age. If charity, on the other hand, was to be done always publicly and openly: with religion again it would degenerate into mere hypocrisy, formality, and outside shew. Wisely therefore, very wisely, has our Saviour (who has given us the most perfect model of religion) enjoined both the public and the private practice of this great and essential duty of it.

But besides the circumstance of place, there is the manner in the person to be observed, which is sometimes as engaging as the bounty he bestows. It is the least glory in a person of worth to be superior to others in point of station and fortune: his greatest honour is to make that superiority sit gracefully upon him, without any forbidding appearances; and to make his inferior as little sensible of it as possible by an easy dignity, and by an affable complacency of behaviour. An action
good

good in itself is greatly recommended by an agreeable manner of doing it: an agreeable manner being to actions, what a lively manner of expression is to our sense; it beautifies and adorns it, and gives it all the advantage whereof it is capable. There is the same difference between a beneficial deed, when endeared by an easy, affable deportment, and when destitute of that circumstance, as between a beautiful object when enlivened by the chearful light of the sun, and when exhibited in a dim, sickly light. In a word, it is our duty in general not only to have virtue, but to make our virtue appear truly amiable.

A delicacy of this kind is chiefly to be observed with those who have not been used to receive charity: where we should endeavour as much to conceal our benevolence, as they do to hide their misery: imitating herein the behaviour of an heathen philosopher, who contrived his bounty to be conveyed in so secret a manner, that chance rather than design seemed to have had the disposal of it.

A few words respecting the motives to Charity shall close this discourse. These
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may be derived, first, from the natural principle of compassion.

Compassion is the call of our Father which is in heaven, to us his children who are in prosperity, to put us upon relieving our brethren who are in distress. This is an affection wisely interwoven in our frame by the author of nature: that, whereas dry and abstracted reason is too sedentary and remiss a counsellor, we might have a more instant and vigorous pleader in our breasts to excite us to acts of charity. As far indeed as it is ingrafted in us, it is mere instinct: but when we cultivate and cherish it till we love mercy; when we dwell upon each tender sentiment that opens our mind, and enlarges our heart; then it becomes a virtue. Whoever then thou art, whose heart is hardened and waxed gross, put thyself in the room of some poor unfriended wretch, beset perhaps with a large family; broken with miseries, and pining with poverty; his mind as it were bleeding inwards, while silent grief, like a worm at the core, preys upon his vitals: in such a case what would'st thou think it reasonable thy rich neighbours should do? that they, like the
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Priest and Levite in the Gospel, should look on thee with an eye of indifference, and then "pass by on the other side?" or that, like the good Samaritan, they should pour balm into thy wounded spirit? Be thyself the judge, and whatever thou shalt think reasonable thy neighbours should do unto thee, in such a situation; go thou, and do likewise unto them. Make the case of the poor your own, and then consider how much you would, or might with reason expect from the rich, and then give accordingly.

Another motive to charity is the pleasure of benevolence.

What can delight a generous soul more, than to make misery and woe vanish before him, like darkness before the light; to raise a heart that was sinking beneath the weight of grief? to brighten up that countenance which was overcast with sorrow, into joy and gladness? to revive with refreshing showers of love and kindness that barren and dry land where no water was? How must his heart burn within him while his hands are thus stretched out! Believe me, it is but a well-judged, more refined, and better

better taste for pleasure, to lay out, in lightening the heavy burden of our fellow-creatures, that money which all of us, more or less, expend in innocent but useless gratifications; and too many of us, it may be, in criminal pleasures. And who would not deny himself the short-lived indulgence of some appetite, some trifling and gay diversion, rather than see his brother pinched with necessity, and starving with want? Deny himself, did I say? No; he denies himself the most, who refuses to purchase so many lasting and unallayed pleasures at so easy a rate.

He that centers all his regard upon himself, exclusively of others, has placed his affections on the most worthless object in the world, himself. He that has shut his hands, and steeled his heart, against all impressions of compassion, is a most insignificant blank in the creation. He may have sense enough to get and keep his fortune: but he has too little spirit truly to relish and enjoy it, by communicating it to others. For joy like light grows greater by being communicated: and that happiness, which is solitary, is but happiness by halves. If, as our
Saviour

Saviour says, "it is more blessed to give than to receive," then you are to look upon him who asks, and deserves your charity, as your greatest benefactor. He that gives you an opportunity of doing good, substantial good, in effect obliges you; he gives you what is far more valuable, and more valued by every good man, than the gold and silver which you part with to him. To be rich in good works is the most lasting riches.

But this brings me to the last motive which at present I shall suggest to enforce the duty of liberality to the poor, which is, the future recompence of reward.

We are all, rich and poor, travelling to one country; and we should not scruple to accommodate our indigent fellow-travellers with necessaries on the road, when we are sure of being repaid at our journey's end with an immense reward. Remember that at the last day, the great question will not be, whether you have been negatively good, whether you have done no harm? but, what good you have done? what "hungry ye have fed?" what "sick ye have visited?" The rich man in the Gospel is not charged with injuring any person, or defrauding
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ing his neighbour. The only fault recorded is, that he "fared sumptuously every day," while "Lazarus lay at his gate" perishing for want of common necessities. He was one of that set of men, who are very hospitable to those that do not want, and very unfriendly to those that do.

This then was his crime; and yet the next report that we have of him is, that "in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments." A melancholy and shocking consideration to those "who have this world's goods, and yet shut up their bowels of compassion" against their brethren in distress.

Our Saviour has made the poor his representatives: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me." And Solomon says, "He that giveth unto the poor, lendeth unto the Lord." Charity is then a treasure transferred to heaven, it bestows on the receiver the comforts of this life; and on the giver, the glories of another.

The riches that we have given away will remain with us for ever. "Charity never faileth;" the same habit of love

which we have acquired and confirmed by many repeated acts of kindness, will accompany us into another world. When we have shewn mercy to our fellow-creatures, we may safely expect it from our Creator: to whom may all honour and glory be given, both now and for ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XV.

THE WRETCHEDNESS OF A WAVERING MIND.

GENESIS XLIX. 4.

Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.

THESE are part of the dying patriarch Jacob's words, when he blessed the twelve, "leaning upon the top of his staff." Of the eldest of these, Reuben, the character he gives is contained in the words of the text; of which there are several very different interpretations. I shall not trouble you with them,

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but take that which they most naturally and obviously bear. And according to that, Jacob, in these words, seems to represent Reuben to be of a fickle, uncertain, irresolute temper; not utterly void of all propensions to goodness, but incapable of acting up to them; not without honest and virtuous resolutions, but unable firmly to keep and practise them. And this being his case, he pronounces upon him, that he "shall not excel." That is, that he shall never arrive to any pitch and perfection in virtue, nor ever command a thorough esteem and respect from good men; that he should never be able eminently to distinguish himself by the exercise of those good qualities of mind, which procure honour and happiness to men in this world, and in another. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

From these words a natural occasion will be given me of discoursing to you of the ill condition of that man, who, like Reuben in the text, being unstable as water, is distracted between two courses of life, a good and a bad one.

Now the condition of a man who is divided between two contrary ways of life,

life, between virtue and vice, godliness and irreligion, is certainly very wretched and deplorable. For he is in the meanest state of mind that human nature is capable of. He is perpetually restless and uneasy; full of anxiety and torment. He loses all the advantages of this world: and most assuredly forfeits all pretences to any in the next.

This doubtful, uncertain way of living and thinking proceeds from a mean state of mind, such as is beneath the dignity of human nature.

Man was made to discern and embrace truth; and, for this reason, "there is a spirit in him; and the inspiration of the Almighty has given him understanding." He has faculties, whereby he may distinguish between true and false, right and wrong; and may fix to himself sure principles of action. When he does this, approves what is best, and adheres to what he approves, he does what he was designed to do, and answers the end of his being. When he does not, but suffers himself to be swayed and bent different ways by different motives, and to float under uncertainties, then he forfeits the great and most distinguishing

perogative of his reasonable nature. The scripture therefore alloweth not to the irresolute and the inconstant the name of men: they are said to be "children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine." They are in the weakness and nonage of their reason, which is as yet not improved and ripened into its due strength and maturity.

The perfection of man is to be like God; for "in his own image created he him;" to be like God in all his attributes, particularly in that glorious one of his immutability; whereby he is, as the scripture speaks, "without variableness, or shadow of turning; the same yesterday, to day, and for ever."

Now this immutability of God is twofold, relating either to his nature, or his purposes. The unchangeableness of his nature we have no room to imitate: for he designed us for a changeable state, made us creatures that were to purify our natures, and exalt them by degrees; till by his last great and glorious change he should translate us into an immortal and unalterable state, and make us eternally the same in our natures, and eternally happy in the exercise of them. But his
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moral immutability, the steadiness of his counsels, purposes and actions, we may in some measure, and therefore must imitate, as far as human frailty will suffer us. We are like him in this perfection, when we get to ourselves, by thought and reflection, a firm persuasion of the eternal differences of good and evil, and of that inseparable dependance which reward and punishment have upon them; and when we govern our lives under the sense of these persuasions, evenly and uniformly. This is truly godlike! the great improvement, the honour, and the excellence of our natures! And this perfection he robs himself of, who wavers between different principles and practices; and is sometimes good and sometimes bad, as it happens. He puts not his faculties to that use, for which they were given him; employs not his reason to those purposes, for which it was designed, the establishing and strengthening of his mind in moral principles; but lives as much at random, and without hold, as if the breath of the Almighty were not in him.

Indeed, unless reason gives us a firmness and constancy of acting, it is so far

from being the glory and the privilege, that it is really the reproach and disgrace of our natures; and makes us lower than even "the horse and the mule that have no understanding." For they, without that, act always regularly and consonantly to themselves, under the never-erring guidance of instinct; a blind, but sure principle; whilst man, with all his boasted titles and privileges, wanders about in uncertainties, does and undoes; and contradicts himself throughout all the various scenes of thinking and living.

But the dignity of our nature, is a consideration capable of touching but few. Let us go on therefore to more plain and affecting considerations. For such an unsettled temper of mind as we have described, creates a great deal of trouble and disturbance to the man, who is so unhappy as to be master of it.

And this follows plainly from what has been discoursed upon the former head. For whatsoever is natural, becoming, and worthy of us, is attended always with ease and delight to the doer; whereas that which thwarts our first end and design, and is destructive of our natural perfections, must needs be pain and grief
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to us. For the truth of which in this particular case we may appeal to the feeling of all those, who have ever once made the experiment. How uneasy is that man always to himself, who acts backwards and forwards, and has no found bottom to rest upon! What disquiets does it create in his mind, to see himself perpetually condemning himself, allowing himself in that opinion or practice this hour, which he is sure he shall disallow and go against in the next!

Certainly a mind, thus at variance with itself, cannot but be very troublesome to the man that has it; unless, together with the power of keeping his resolutions, he has lost also that of reflecting afterwards on the breach of them. For whenever he looks back upon his actions, guilt and folly will appear written, as it were, upon the front of them: he must needs pronounce himself light and inconsistent, insincere, and void of that true fear of God, which dwells only with simplicity and a single heart. In fine; so many disagreeable and mortifying thoughts will offer themselves to him, as cannot but leave a wound behind them. And “a spirit thus wounded,”

—with guilt and folly too—“who can bear?” In truth, as to ease of mind, it belongs oftentimes to the compleatly wicked, more than to those who are by halves so. For the first may have hardened and stupified his conscience so far, till it lets him alone, and gives him no farther notice of the danger of the state he is in. But he who sins and repents, and then sins again in an endless circle, is sure to hear of his own follies, and be sensible of his own miseries. His good fits are like the short intervals of madness, which serve only to let the madman into a knowledge of his own disease; whereas it would be much more to his satisfaction and content, if he were mad always.

Good God! When a man finds himself breaking through all the strongest bonds that should hold him; through his most deliberate resolutions, made in time of great danger and adversity, or upon his solemn approach to the table of the Lord, but forgotten again in the presence of any new temptation, what horrors must the sense of this create in him! What hatred and contempt of himself! What despair almost of ever arriving at
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that strength and firmness of mind, which is requisite to carry him evenly on through the paths of virtue! Surely he "is like" the troubled sea, that cannot rest, whose "waters cast up mire and dirt. There" is no peace, saith my God," to such a wicked man as this.

But further; Such a temper, so distracted between contrary inclinations and practices, is mischievous to a man in point of interest, as well as ease. For it renders him unfit for all the affairs and business of his life; incapable of forming advantageous designs with confidence, or of prosecuting them with effect. "A double minded man," saith St. James, "is unstable in all his ways." He that is so in point of religion (the greatest and most important concern of life, the one thing necessary) will probably be so in every thing beside; and then what kind of undertaking is such a one qualified for? To what calling can he betake himself with any probability of success, who wants the very first elements of thriving, industry, constancy, and perseverance? Alas! the doubts and misgivings of his heart concerning his own internal state are such, as take away from

him the taste of all outward comforts at present, and hinder him from an effectual pursuit of them. It must be a mind easy and at rest, that can apply itself thoroughly towards making those advantages of the things of this life, which are innocent and lawful. And such a one is not his, whose ways, as the wise man speaks, "are double before the Lord." Besides, this unequalness in acting, these heats and these colds in religion, when once they appear, (and how can they chuse but appear some time or other?) will draw upon a man the suspicion of hypocrisy and dissimulation. He, who in the eye of the world is sometimes good, and sometimes bad, as it happens, will be sure to have the measure of himself taken from the worst side of him; and the other parts of his character esteemed only as pure artifice and feigning. His credit will be blasted, and his good name taken away; that engine, by which he is to profit himself and others, and to do all the good he is like to do in the world. Intimacies and friendships are the great comforts and supports of life, and of these such a man will be thought incapable. What ground can his levity give
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any one to build their confidence upon? What encouragement is there to venture an acquaintance with the rash and unstable? What reason to expect a mutual consent and agreement of thoughts and affections, from a mind so little at unity in itself?

But these are slight inconveniences, in comparison of what follows; that such a wavering uncertain temper of mind is utterly inconsistent with the terms of salvation, and the hopes of eternal happiness. For it is not an holiness taken up by fits and starts, that can carry a man to heaven. It must be a constant regular principle, influencing us throughout, that must do that. "If ye continue in my word" (says our Saviour) "then are ye my disciples indeed." An uninterrupted course of virtue and goodness, and nothing less, can justify us before God, and entitle us to our reward. And the reason is, because nothing less can prove our sincerity to God, which is the great and fundamental rule, by which we are to be tried. And a vein of this must run through all our thoughts and actions, to make them acceptable before God. My Son, give me thine heart, says God; that
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is, come to me with a sincere and unfeigned design of serving me; surrender up to me all thy inclinations and affections without reserve; and give me possession of thy soul, without any rival or competitor. Which how can he be said to do, that admits contrary interests perpetually to struggle within him, and in his most unfeigned repentance is not without some prospect of sinning again? Holy David therefore makes insincerity the character and mark of these kind of men: "Their heart was not right with God," says he, "neither were they stedfast in his covenant." The one follows upon the other; if men be not stedfast, neither can their hearts be right with God.

Let not a man therefore flatter himself that things are well with him, because he is not absolutely "given over to work wickedness," but though he sometimes seems to be "dead in trespasses and sins," yet he soon rises again by repentance; for assuredly this (which is at the bottom nothing but an art of getting to heaven, and yet enjoying his vices all the while) will not serve his turn. There is no promise in Scripture that belongs to the
unstable

unstable and wavering man; the terms of the covenant are universal purity; or at least universal sincerity: and under these, can no man be saved. And as the state of a man is thus, with respect to another world, very dangerous and bad already, so is it likely to grow worse and worse still without remedy. For every new return to sin, every single desertion of virtue naturally unqualifies a man more and more for a sound repentance, and weakens all the motives that lead to it. Sin by this means grows familiar to us, and loses its frightfulness. By our suffering its continual approaches, it begins to appear to us in a more harmless shape: we find fewer horrors about us at the thought of it, fewer desires of avoiding it.

To preserve or recover ourselves from this unhappy fickleness and irresolution of mind; let us consider what the particular weight is, which has hitherto clogged our virtuous endeavours. There is some particular sin of our constitution, some great and ruling infirmity, that damps all our good motions, and spoils all our best resolutions; and will continue to do so, till by a direct opposition
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of ourselves to it, we have conquered and removed it. When we have cut off this right hand, plucked out this right eye, sacrificed the darling lust of our heart, we may then hope, that the greatest part of the difficulty is over, and that no less powerful temptation will be able to draw us aside. But till this be done, in vain are all our other attempts and designs. While the great offence has yet any hold upon us, nothing will be done to purpose; but he that has been divided in his opinion, and wavering in his practice, will be divided and wavering still.

If to these endeavours we add fervent and unwearied prayer to Almighty God, for the aids and supports of his grace, we shall assuredly from thence be made perfect at last, be stablished, strengthened, settled. We shall have a new heart created in us, that will enable us to “be
“stedfast, immoveable, always abound-
“ing in the work of the Lord.”

S E R M O N XVI.

THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST NOT OF THIS
WORLD.

JOHN XVIII. 36.

*Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this
world.*

ONE of those great effects, which
length of time is seen to bring along
with it, is the alteration of the meaning
annexed to certain sounds. The signifi-
cation of a word, well known and under-
stood by those who first made use of it, is
very

very insensibly varied, by passing through many mouths, and by being taken and given by multitudes, in common discourse; till it often comes to stand for a complication of notions, as distant from the original intention of it, nay, as contradictory to it, as darkness is to light. The ignorance and weakness of some, and the passions and bad designs of others, are the great instruments of this evil: which, even when it seems to affect only indifferent matters, ought in reason to be opposed, as it tends, in its nature, to confound men's notions in weightier points; but, when it hath once invaded the most sacred and important subjects, ought, in duty, to be resisted with a more open and undisguised zeal, as what toucheth the very vitals of all that is good, and is just going to take from men's eyes the boundaries of right and wrong.

The only cure for this evil, in cases of so great concern, is to have recourse to the originals of things, to the law of reason in those points which can be traced back thither; and to the declarations of Jesus Christ, and his immediate followers; in such matters as took their rise
solely

solely from those declarations. For the case is plainly this, that words and sounds have had such an effect, not upon the nature of things, which is unmoveable, but upon the minds of men in thinking of them; that the very same word remaining, which at first truly represented one certain thing, by having multitudes of new inconsistent ideas, in every age, and every year, added to it, becomes itself the greatest hinderance to the true understanding of the nature of the thing first intended by it.

For instance; Religion, in St. James's days, was virtue and integrity, as to ourselves, and charity and beneficence to others, before God, even the Father. By degrees, it is come to signify, in most of the countries throughout the world, the performance of every thing almost, except virtue and charity; and particularly, a punctual exactness in a regard to particular times, places, forms, and modes, diversified according to the various humours of men; recommended and practised under the avowed name of external religion: two words, which, in the sense fixed upon them by many christians, God hath put asunder; and which, therefore,

fore, no man should join together. And accordingly, the notion of a religious man differs in every country, just as much as times, places, ceremonies, imaginary austerities, and all other outward circumstances, are different and various: whereas in truth, though a man, truly religious in other respects, may make use of such things; yet they cannot be the least part of his religion, properly so called, any more than his food, or his raiment, or any other circumstance of his life.

Thus, likewise the notion of the church of Christ, which, at first, was only the number, small or great, of those who believed him to be the Messiah; or of those who subjected themselves to him, as their head, in the affair of religion; hath since that time been so diversified by the various alterations it hath undergone, that it is almost impossible so much as to number up the many inconsistent images that have come, by daily additions, to be united together in it. Nothing, therefore, can be more useful, than to consider the same thing, under some other images, which hath not been so much used; nor consequently so much defaced. And since the image of his kingdom, is that, under
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der which our Lord himself chose to represent it: we may be sure that, if we sincerely examine our notion of his church, by what he saith of his kingdom, in the text, that it is not of this world, we shall exclude out of it, every thing that he would have excluded; and then, what remains will be true, pure, and uncorrupted. And what I have to say, in order to this, will be comprehended under two general heads.

First; As the church of Christ is the kingdom of Christ, he himself is King: and in this it is implied, that he is himself the sole Law-giver to his subjects, and himself the sole Judge of their behaviour, in the affairs of conscience and eternal salvation. And in this sense, therefore, "his kingdom is not of this world:" he hath, in those points, left behind him no visible human authority, no vicegerents who can be said properly to supply his place; no interpreters, upon whom his subjects are absolutely to depend; no judges over the consciences or religion of his people. For if this were so, that any such absolute vicegerent authority, either for making new laws, or interpreting old ones, or judging his
subjects

subjects in religious matters, were lodged in any men upon earth; the consequence would be, that what still retains the name of the church of Christ, would not be the kingdom of Christ, but the kingdom of those men, vested with such authority. For, whoever hath such an authority of making laws, is so far a king: and whoever can add new laws to those of Christ, equally obligatory, is as truly a king, as Christ himself is; nay, whoever hath an absolute authority to interpret any written or spoken laws; it is he, who is truly the law-giver, to all intents and purposes; and not the person who first wrote, or spake them.

In human society, the interpretation of laws, may, of necessity, be lodged, in some cases, in the hands of those who were not originally the legislators. But this is not absolute; nor of bad consequence to society: because the legislators can resume the interpretation into their own hands, as they are witnesses to what passes in the world; and as they can, and will, sensibly interpose in all those cases, in which their interposition becomes necessary. And therefore, they are still properly the legislators. But it is otherwise

wise in religion, or the kingdom of Christ. He himself never interposeth, since his first promulgation of his law, either to convey infallibility to such as pretend to handle it over again; or to assert the true interpretation of it, amidst the various and contradictory opinions of men about it. If he did certainly thus interpose, he himself would still be the legislator. But, as he doth not; if such an absolute authority be once lodged with men, under the notion of interpreters, they then become the legislators, and not Christ; and they rule in their own kingdom, and not in his.

It is the same thing, as to rewards and punishments, to carry forward the great end of his kingdom. If any men upon earth have a right to add to the sanctions of his laws; that is, to increase the number, or alter the nature, of the rewards and punishments, of his subjects, in matters of conscience or salvation: they are so far kings in his stead; and reign in their own kingdom, and not in his. So it is, whenever they erect tribunals, and exercise a judgment over the consciences of men; and assume to themselves the determination of such points, as cannot be deter-

determined, but by one who knows the hearts; or, when they make any of their own declarations, or decisions, to concern and affect the state of Christ's subjects, with regard to the favour of God: this is so far, the taking Christ's kingdom out of his hands, and placing it in their own.

Nor is this matter at all made better by their declaring themselves to be vice-gérents, or law-makers, or judges, under Christ, in order to carry on the ends of his kingdom. For it comes to this at last (since it doth not seem fit to Christ himself to interpose so as to prevent or remedy all their mistakes and contradictions) that, if they have this power of interpreting or adding laws, and judging men, in such a sense, that christians shall be indispensably and absolutely obliged to obey those laws, and to submit to those decisions; if they have this power lodged with them, then the kingdom, in which they rule, is not the kingdom of Christ, but of themselves; he doth not rule in it, but they: and whether they happen to agree with him, or to differ from him, as long as they are the law-givers, and judges, without any interpo-
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sition from Christ, either to guide or correct their decisions, they are kings of his kingdom, and not Christ Jesus.

If, therefore, the church of Christ be the kingdom of Christ; it is essential to it, that Christ himself be the sole law-giver, and sole judge of his subjects, in all points relating to the favour or displeasure of Almighty God; and that all his subjects, in what station soever they may be, are equally subjects to him; and that no one of them, any more than another, hath authority, either to make new laws for Christ's subjects; or to impose a sense upon the old ones, which is the same thing; or to judge, censure, or punish the servants of another master, in matters relating purely to conscience, or salvation. If any person hath any other notion, either through a long use of words with inconsistent meanings, or through a negligence of thought; let him but ask himself, whether the church of Christ be the kingdom of Christ, or not? And, if it be, whether this notion of it doth not absolutely exclude all other legislators and judges, in matters relating to conscience, or the favour of God? Or, whether it can be his kingdom, if any mortal men

have such a power of legislation and judgment in it? This enquiry will bring us back to the first, which is the only true account of the church of Christ, or the kingdom of Christ, in the mouth of a christian; That it is the number of men, whether small or great, whether dispersed or united, who truly and sincerely are subjects to Jesus Christ alone as their law-giver and judge, in matters relating to the favour of God, and their eternal salvation.

The next principal point is, that, if the church be the kingdom of Christ; and this kingdom be not of this world: this must appear from the nature and end of the laws of Christ; and of those rewards and punishments, which are the sanctions of his laws. Now his laws are declarations, relating to the favour of God in another state after this. They are declarations of those conditions to be performed in this world, on our part, without which God will not make us happy in that to come. And they are almost all general appeals to the will of God; to his nature, known by the common reason of mankind; and to the imitation of that nature, which must be our perfection.

fection. The keeping his commandments is declared the way to life; and the doing his will, the entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The being subjects to Christ, is to this very end, that we may the better and more effectually perform the will of God. The laws of this kingdom, therefore, as Christ left them, have nothing of this world in their view; no tendency, either to the exaltation of some, in worldly pomp and dignity; or to their absolute dominion over the faith and religious conduct of others of his subjects; or to the erecting of any sort of temporal kingdom, under the covert and name of a spiritual one.

The sanctions of Christ's laws are rewards and punishments. But of what sort? Not the rewards of this world; not the offices, or glories of this state; not the pains of prisons, banishments, fines, or any lesser and more moderate penalties; nay, not the much lesser negative discouragements that belong to human society. He was far from thinking that these could be the instruments of such a persuasion, as he thought acceptable to God. But, as the great end of his kingdom, was to guide men to

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happiness after the short images of it were over here below; so, he took his motives from that place, where his kingdom first began, and where it was at last to end; from those rewards and punishments in a future state, which had no relation to this world: and, to shew that his "kingdom was not of this world," all the sanctions which he thought fit to give to his laws, were not of this world at all.

St. Paul understood this so well, that he gives an account of his own conduct, and that of others in the same station, in these words, "knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men:" whereas, in too many christian countries, since his days, if some, who profess to succeed him, were to give an account of their own conduct, it must be in a quite contrary strain; "knowing the terrors of this world, and having them in our power, we do not persuade men, but force their outward profession against their inward persuasion."

Now, wherever this is practised; whether in a great degree, or a small; in that place there is so far a change, from a kingdom which is not of this world, to a
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kingdom which is of this world. As soon as ever you hear of any of the engines of this world, whether of the greater, or the lesser sort, you must immediately think that then, and so far, the kingdom of this world takes place. For, if the very essence of God's worship be spirit and truth; if religion be virtue and charity, under the belief of a Supreme Governor and Judge; if true real faith cannot be the effect of force; and, if there can be no reward where there is no willing choice: then, in all, or any of these cases, to apply force or flattery, worldly pleasure or pain; is to act contrary to the interests of true religion, as it is plainly opposite to the maxims upon which Christ founded his kingdom; who chose the motives which are not of this world, to support a kingdom which is not of this world. And indeed, it is too visible to be hid, that wherever the rewards and punishments are changed, from future to present, from the world to come, to the world now in possession; there, the kingdom founded by our Saviour is, in the nature of it, so far changed, that it is become, in such a degree, what he professed, his kingdom was not:

that is, of this world; of the same sort with other common earthly kingdoms, in which the rewards are, worldly honours, posts, offices, pomp, attendance, dominion; and the punishments are, prisons, fines, banishments, gallies, and racks; or something less, of the same sort.

If these can be the true supports of a kingdom which is not of this world; then sincerity, and hypocrisy; religion, and no religion; force, and persuasion; a willing choice, and a terrified heart; are become the same things: truth and falsehood stand in need of the same methods, to propagate and support them; and our Saviour himself was little acquainted with the right way of increasing the number of such subjects, as he wished for. If he had but at first enlightened the powers of this world, as he did St. Paul; and employed the sword which they bore, and the favours they had in their hands, to bring subjects into his kingdom; this had been an expeditious and an effectual way, according to the conduct of some of his professed followers, to have had a glorious and extensive kingdom, or church. But this was not his design; unless it could be compassed in quite a different way. And

And therefore, when you see our Lord, in his methods, so far removed from those of many of his disciples ; when you read nothing, in his doctrine about his own kingdom, of taking in the concerns of this world, and mixing them with those of eternity ; no commands, that the frowns and discouragements of this present state should in any case attend upon conscience and religion ; no rules against the enquiry of all his subjects into his original message from heaven ; no orders for the kind and charitable force of penalties, or capital punishments, to make men think and choose aright ; no calling upon the secular arm, whenever the magistrate should become christian, to enforce his doctrines, or to back his spiritual authority ; but, on the contrary, as plain a declaration as a few words can make, that “ his kingdom is “ not of this world :” I say, when you see this, from the whole tenor of the gospel, so vastly opposite to many who take his name into their mouths, the questions with you ought to be, whether he did not know the nature of his own kingdom, or church, better than any since his time ; whether you can suppose, he left
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any such matters to be decided against himself, and his own express professions; and whether, if an angel from heaven should give you any account of his kingdom, contrary to what he himself hath done, it can be of any weight, or authority, with christians.

I have now made some such observations, drawn from the church being the kingdom of Christ, and not of any men in that kingdom; from the nature of his laws, and from those rewards and punishments, which are the sanctions of those laws; as lead us naturally into the true notion of the church, or kingdom, of Christ, by excluding out of it every thing inconsistent with his being king, law-giver, and judge; as well as with the nature of his laws, and of his promises and threatnings. I will only make two or three observations, grounded upon this; and so conclude. And, first,

From what hath been said, it is very plain in general, that the grossest mistakes in judgment, about the nature of Christ's kingdom, or church, have arisen from hence, that men have argued from other visible societies, and other visible kingdoms of this world, to what ought to be visible

visible and sensible, in his kingdom : constantly leaving out of their notion, the most essential part of it, that Christ is king in his own kingdom ; forgetting this king himself, because he is not now seen by mortal eyes ; and substituting others in his place, as lawgivers and judges, in the same points, in which he must either alone, or not at all, be lawgiver and judge : not contented with such a kingdom as he established, and desires to reign in ; but urging and contending that his kingdom must be like other kingdoms. Whereas he hath positively warned them against any such arguings, by assuring them that this kingdom is his kingdom, and that it is not of this world ; and therefore that no one of his subjects is lawgiver and judge over others of them, in matters relating to salvation, but he alone ; and that we must not frame our ideas, from the kingdoms of this world, of what ought to be, in a visible and sensible manner, in his kingdom.

From what hath been said it appears, that the kingdom of Christ, which is the church of Christ, is the number of persons who are sincerely, and willingly, sub-

subjects to him, as lawgiver and judge, in all matters truly relating to conscience, or eternal salvation. And the more close and immediate this regard to him is, the more certainly and the more evidently true it is, that they are of his kingdom. This may appear fully to their own satisfaction, if they have recourse to him himself, in the gospel; if they think it a sufficient authority, that he hath declared the conditions of their salvation, and that no man upon earth hath any authority to declare any other, or to add one tittle to them; if they resolve to perform what they see, he layeth a stress upon; and if they trust no mortal, with the absolute direction of their consciences, the pardon of their sins, or the determining of their interest in God's favour; but wait for their judge, who alone can bring to light "the hidden things of darkness."

If they feel themselves disposed and resolved to receive the words of eternal life from himself; to take their faith from what he himself once delivered, who knew better than all the rest of the world what he required of his own subjects; to direct their worship by his rule, and their whole practice by the general law
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which he laid down: if they feel themselves in this disposition, they may be very certain, that they are truly his subjects, and members of his kingdom. Nor need they envy the happiness of others, who may think it a much more evident mark of their belonging to the kingdom of Christ, that they have other lawgivers, and judges, in Christ's religion, besides Jesus Christ; that they have recourse not to his own words, but the words of others who profess to interpret them; that they are ready to submit to this interpretation, let it be what it will; that they have set up to themselves the idol of an unintelligible authority, both in belief, and worship, and practice; in words, under Jesus Christ, but in deed and in truth over him; as it removes the minds of his subjects from himself, to weak, and passionate men; and as it claims that rule and power in his kingdom, which he himself alone can have. But,

This will be another observation, that it evidently destroys the rule and authority of Jesus Christ, as king, to set up any other authority in his kingdom, to which his subjects are indispensably and absolutely obliged to submit their consciences,

ences, or their conduct, in what is properly called religion. There are some professed christians, who contend openly for such an authority, as indispensably obliges all around them to unity of profession; that is, to profess even what they do not, what they cannot, believe to be true. This sounds so grossly, that others, who think they act a glorious part in opposing such an enormity, are very willing, for their own sakes, to retain such an authority as shall oblige men, whatever they themselves think, though not to profess what they do not believe, yet, to forbear the profession and publication of what they do believe, let them believe it of ever so great importance.

Both these pretensions are founded upon the mistaken notion of the peace, as well as authority of the kingdom, that is, the church of Christ. Which of them is the most insupportable to an honest and a christian mind, I am not able to say: because they both equally found the authority of the church of Christ, upon the ruins of sincerity and common honesty; and mistake stupidity and sleep, for peace; because they would both equally have prevented all reformation where it
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hath been, and will for ever prevent it where it is not already; and in a word, because both equally divest Jesus Christ of his empire in his own kingdom, set the obedience of his subjects loose from himself, and teach them to prostitute their consciences at the feet of others, who have no right in such a manner to trample upon them.

The peace of Christ's kingdom is a manly and reasonable peace; built upon charity, and love, and mutual forbearance, and receiving one another, as God receives us. As for any other peace, founded upon a submission of our honesty, as well as our understandings, it is falsely so called. It is not the peace of the kingdom of Christ, but the lethargy of it; and a sleep unto death, when his subjects throw off their relation to him, fix their subjection to others, and even in cases where they have a right to see, and where they have a power to see his will, as it really is, shall shut their eyes, and go blindfold at the command of others; because those others are pleased to make themselves the sole judges of the will of their great Lord and Master.

To conclude : The church of Christ is the kingdom of Christ. He is king in his own kingdom. He is sole lawgiver to his subjects, and sole judge, in matters relating to salvation. His laws and sanctions are plainly fixed ; and relate to the favour of God, and not at all to the rewards, or penalties, of this world. All his subjects are equally his subjects ; and, as such, equally without authority to alter, to add to, or to interpret his laws, so as to claim the absolute submission of others to such interpretation. And all are his subjects, and in his kingdom, who are ruled and governed by him. Their faith was once delivered by him. The conditions of their happiness were once laid down by him. The nature of God's worship was once declared by him. And it is easy to judge, whether of the two is most becoming a subject of the kingdom of Christ, that is, a member of his church ; to seek all these particulars in those plain and short declarations of their king and lawgiver himself : or to hunt after them, through the infinite contradictions, the numberless perplexities, the endless disputes, of weak men, in several ages, till the enquirer himself is lost in
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the labyrinth ; and perhaps sits down in despair, or infidelity. If Christ be our king, let us shew ourselves subjects to him alone, in the great affair of conscience and eternal salvation ; and, without fear of man's judgment, live and act as becomes those who wait for the appearance of an all-knowing and impartial judge, even that king, whose " kingdom " is not of this world."

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